

Where Was Noah?

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INTRODUCTION

As time moves forward and our planet becomes smaller, it is important that educators begin modeling curriculum units that integrate a multicultural dynamic. Through my research I have found that companies today are looking for workers who are global trade literate, sensitive to foreign cultures, and conversant in different languages (Wallis and Steptoe 52). With the use of a common mythical element, the catastrophic flood, I intend to foster unique perspectives, including an investigation of the HERO, specifically regarding the Galveston Flood of 1900 and Hurricane Katrina of 2006, in order to promote a culturally diverse classroom that is geared for the twenty-first century.

The unit will be taught in seventh grade vanguard Texas history courses at schools with populations comparable to Lanier Middle School. In addition, schools such as Lanier that participate in the International Baccalaureate Program would benefit greatly. The IB program, which is currently partnered with 2,127 schools in 125 countries, strives to promote “intercultural understanding and respect, not as an alternative to a sense of cultural and national identity, but as an essential part of life in the 21st century” (IBO). My classroom at Lanier is well represented with a variety of different cultures. This requires an indispensable wealth of tolerance and understanding when dealing with sensitive topics, such as flood stories, that are usually embedded in personal belief systems. Furthermore, this unit would allow a teacher with a similar group to take advantage of his/her students’ prior knowledge about their culture to enhance each lesson. Also, with my school located in Houston, Texas, a large portion of my students will already be familiar with flooding. This should add flavor to each lesson, with students sharing personal experiences with this specific phenomena.

OBJECTIVES

This unit will satisfy HISD objectives in seventh grade social studies. The student will:

- Identify a major era in Texas history, specifically the turn of the twentieth century, and describe its defining characteristics.
- Analyze the economic, social, and political impact of the Galveston flood.
- Interpret maps, graphs, and charts to pose and answer questions about the Galveston flood.
- Use critical thinking skills to evaluate primary and secondary source documents.
- Compare and contrast two historical events to gain unique perspectives.

RATIONALE

This curriculum unit will attempt to connect myth with reality by relating two contemporary tragedies, the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 and the more recent disaster wrought by Hurricane Katrina in 2006, to the ancient flood stories important to the students’ own cultures. Throughout my research I have found that flood stories adhere to the following linear pattern:

- Humans are guilty of misconduct.
- A god sends a flood as punishment for the sin.
- Instructions are sent to an individual to build a craft, ensuring the survival of all species.
- The flood destroys the old race or culture.

After the flood, a new, less sinful race begins the population of the planet. Using this pattern, my students will then hear stories of bravery and sacrifice to better understand the idea of the hero. The popular flood hero Noah, along with not-so-popular heroes Anthony Letcher and Abdulrahman Zeitoun of New Orleans, and Daisy Thorne of Galveston, will serve as a basis of comparison, as the students investigate this HERO further.

The focus of my unit will be on Galveston Island. In its infancy, the island was a home of rebellion, and later was used as an entry point to smuggle slaves into the United States. But as years passed, Galveston grew into the “New York City of the Gulf” (Larson 12), challenged only by Houston fifty miles to the north. Galveston now had electric streetcars, electric lights, local and long distance service, and its own power plant (Larson 13). However, what happened next was the deadliest natural disaster in the recorded history of North America; Galveston was hit by a deadly flood.

UNIT BACKGROUND

The Flood Stories Unfold

“On that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened.”

~ Genesis 7:11(KJV)

The following ancient flood stories will be used extensively throughout the unit. They are courtesy of the *Journal of Prophecies of Native and Indigenous Peoples Worldwide* at www.wovoca.com.

The Mayans

God sent the flood because the people made from wood (an early version of humans) had no souls, minds, or hearts and had forgotten how they were made. They wanted to escape, but the animals that they had starved and beaten, the pots they had burnt, and the trees they’d stripped refused to help them. Only a few escaped the flood, and it is said that their descendants are monkeys. (<http://www.wovoca.com/myths-flood-1.htm#MAY>)

The Greco-Romans

Zeus decided to punish humanity for its evil ways. Other Gods grieved at the destruction because there would be no beings to worship them. Zeus promised a new stock, a race of miraculous origin. He was going to use thunderbolts when he remembered one of Fate’s decrees: that a time would come when sea and earth and dome of the sky would blaze up, and the massive structure of the universe would collapse in ruins. With Poseidon’s help, he caused storm and earthquake to flood every part of the land except the summit of Mount Parnassus. When Zeus crushed the hanging clouds in his hand, there was a loud crash, and sheets of rain fell from heaven. The rivers began rushing to the sea. When Neptune struck the earth with his trident, the rivers raced across the plains. Sea and earth could no longer be distinguished; all was sea without any shores, covering every living being except for one fortunate couple, Deucalion and Pyrrha. Earlier, Deucalion and Pyrrha had consulted Themis at her oracular shrine. She warned of a future flood, and they prepared by acquiring a boat. In time, their boat ran aground on the summit of

Mount Parnassus. Recognizing their piety, Zeus allowed them to live and withdrew the waters. It was then that Deucalion and Pyrrha remembered the other oracle given by Themis: to repopulate the world by throwing behind you the bones of your great mother. Pyrrha didn't want to injure her mother's ghost by disturbing her bones. Prometheus soothed her fears. They decided that the "bones" were stones in the body of the earth. They threw the stones, which became humans: men of the stones thrown by Deucalion; women, of those cast by Pyrrha. Animals were produced by earth of its own volition. (<http://www.wovoca.com/myths-flood-1.htm#GRE>)

The Hebrew Story of Noah

This story is based on the Babylonian story with the difference that the flood was a harsh punishment for humanity's sinfulness. Noah was 600 years old when it began to rain for what ended up being 40 days and 40 nights. After the end of 150 days, the waters were abated. The ark rested in the seventh month upon the mountains of Ararat. Waters decreased until the 10th month, on the first day of the 10th month; tops of mountains were also seen. At the end of 40 days, Noah opened the windows of the ark. First, he sent a raven, which went to and fro. He then sent a dove, which returned and hadn't found land. After seven more days, another dove was loosed; it returned that evening with an olive leaf. The next week, the dove didn't return. After a year and 10 days from the start of the flood, every creature emerged from the ark. Noah sacrificed some clean animals and birds to God, and God, pleased with this, promised never again to destroy all living creatures. (<http://www.wovoca.com/myths-flood-1.htm#HEB>)

The Sumerians

In the eleventh tablet of the Semitic Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh is a flood story that is the source for the Noah story. The Gods resolved to cleanse the earth of an overpopulated humanity, but Utnapishtim was warned by the God Ea in a dream. He and some craftsmen built a huge (seven decks encompassing one acre in area) ark. Utnapishtim then loaded it with his family, the craftsmen, and the seed of all living creatures. The waters rose up, and a storm continued for six days and six nights. The Gods repented and wept upon seeing the global destruction of living beings and stilled the flood on the seventh day. The waters covered everything but the top of the mountain Nisur, where the boat landed. A dove was loosed, but it returned, having found no place to rest. A swallow was sent, but it too returned. Seven days later, after having loosed a raven that did not return to the ark, the people began to emerge. Utnapishtim made a sacrifice to the Gods. He and his wife were given immortality and lived at the end of the earth. (<http://www.wovoca.com/myths-flood-1.htm#SUM>)

In the Beginning...There Was Galveston, Texas...

*"If I owned Texas and hell, I'd rent out Texas
and live in hell."*

~ General P.H. Sheridan

Galveston Island sits on a slowly eroding bank of sand measuring three miles at its greatest breadth and twenty-eight miles at its greatest length. It is named for the Spanish colonial governor and General Bernardo de Galvez, who never actually set foot on the island, having died soon after his subordinate, Jose de Evia, charted Galveston Bay area on Galvez's behalf. Before it was discovered by Europeans, however, the island was home to the cannibalistic native tribes of the Akokisa and Karankawa who camped, fished, and hunted the swampy land. In 1527, Cabeza De Vaca's limb of the Narvaez expedition landed on Galveston Island, and named it the Isla de Malhado, the "Isle of Misfortune." They survived storms, disease, and hunger among

many other adversities. Later, yellow fever scourged the place in 1867 and prompted Amelia Barr, a resident whose husband and two sons died in the outbreak, to call it the “city of dreadful death.”

During the outbreak, the cry that “the yellow jack is coming” was as fearful to hear as “the Yankees are coming.” The bodies of yellow fever victims at Galveston and New Orleans multiplied faster than they could be buried. That year, 1,100 persons died of yellow fever in Galveston County, and 1,900 more in Harris County. The events of the yellow fever epidemic terrified everyone. A twenty-five-year-old man would be healthy one day and dead three days later, changing relentlessly from a state of debility, fever, and pains in the extremities and loins, to a stage of vomiting blood clots (called the black vomit), to jaundice and death. To many of its residents, Galveston seemed cursed (Larson).

However, like most flood stories, Galveston’s begins with humans being guilty of sin, the sin of pride. Toward the beginning of the twentieth century, due to its geography, the port of Galveston thrived, but at the expense of global goodwill. The Galveston Wharf Company held such monopolistic control over the wharves that the company became known from New York to Liverpool as the Octopus of the Gulf. The island in 1900, along with the rest of the nation, was swollen with pride and overconfidence in technology. One of its French chefs even attempted distinguishing himself with a menu that featured beefsteak god dam a la mode (Larson 13). When speaking of hubris, or the feeling of invulnerability, Galveston was a perfect model. It was a time when the average American felt “four-hundred-percent bigger than the year before” (Larson 5). There was talk even of controlling the weather – of subduing hail with cannon blasts and igniting forest fires to bring rain (Larson 5). In this new age, man would not be intimidated by Mother Nature; at least, not yet.

The story of Galveston begins like most deluge legends, with an angry god displeased with humans’ wicked, sinful behavior. For example, the Hebrew flood story begins with a god that observes the wickedness of man as great on earth, who says that all the thoughts in his heart are only evil continually (Genesis 6:5). Hence, a flood is sent as harsh punishment for humanity’s sinfulness. Moreover, in the Greco-Roman tradition, the god Zeus, along with help from Poseidon, decides to punish humanity for their evil ways. Furthermore, Zeus promises a new stock, a race of miraculous origin. Fate had decreed that a time would come when sea and earth and dome of the sky would blaze up, and the massive structure of the universe would collapse in ruins. In some instances, however, a god will simply resolve to cleanse the earth of an overpopulated humanity such as in the Mesopotamian epic of Gilgamesh. And in other, more symbolic examples, such as the Mayan flood story, a god sends a flood because the people made from wood had no souls, minds, or hearts and had forgotten how they were made.

The Storm

*“I am here and my fingers are in the wound,
and I assure you that the side was pierced and
the nails did go through.*

~ Clara Barton

Hurricanes, such as the one that struck Galveston in 1900, have their origins in the Atlantic Ocean off the western coast of Africa. Appropriately, the word “hurricane” comes from the name “Hurican,” the Caribbean god of evil. Every year between June 1 and November 30 (commonly called hurricane season), hurricanes threaten the eastern and gulf coasts of the United States, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean. These huge storms wreak havoc when they make landfall. They can kill thousands of people and cause billions of dollars in property damage when they hit heavily populated areas. Beginning as small clusters of thunderstorms, they move out over the ocean sucking up massive amounts of heat and water vapor. Sometimes these storms

will begin spinning and obtain wind speeds anywhere from 75-150 miles per hour. Comparatively, the storm surge, or flood caused by the storm, literally lifts the level of the ocean and inundates its target with several feet of water. This is the most destructive aspect of the storm.

A telegram, conveying one of the first accounts to the outside world of the terrible calamity which fell upon the city of Galveston on Saturday 8, 1900, described the storm as “one of the most awful tragedies of modern times” (Green and Kelly 3). This is not an understatement. The telegram continues, “The wreck of Galveston was brought about by a tempest so terrible that no words can adequately describe its intensity, and by a flood which turned the city into a raging sea” (Greene and Kelly 3). The island on which the city stands was overcome by the waters of the Gulf of Mexico for six hours, accompanied with a storm which drenched and tore through the Texas Coast for 16 hours. The force of the winds that lashed Galveston was between sixty and one hundred miles an hour, destroying a large majority of structures on the island. Next the flood came, as the storm surge lifted the waters of the sea onto the island, covering it in several feet of water. Estimates of the number dead range from 6,000 to 12,000, however no one will ever know the true amount of bodies the sea took with it during those horrific hours. No such storm had ever visited Galveston, spreading such devastation and so much suffering in its wake.

The Roman gods of Zeus and Poseidon, found in the Greco-Roman flood story recounted by Ovid, clearly represent this storm. Zeus, the hurricane, the fiercest power on earth, teams with Poseidon, ruler of the seas, to expose the vulnerability of humans to nature’s fury. At first, Zeus was to strike the earth with a barrage of lightning bolts; however, he realized that such an attack might threaten heaven itself, so he resolved to destroy earth’s inhabitants with water rather than fiery lightning. When Zeus crushed the clouds with his hands, there was a loud crash, and sheets of rain fell from heaven. When Poseidon struck the earth with his trident, the ocean raced across the open plains. Both man and beast fell prey to the ever-rising flood. Orchards and planted fields were washed away. Houses and other buildings were either demolished by the crashing waves or submerged beneath a sea that had no shores. Not even the temples and sacred images were spared. The birds themselves, their wings finally tiring from continuous flight, in the end were forced to surrender to watery graves. Sea and earth could no longer be distinguished. Open water, destruction, and chaos was all there was.

I Need a Hero

*“I need a hero, I’m holding out for a hero till
the morning light...He’s gotta be sure and he’s
gotta be soon and he’s gotta be larger than
life...”*

~ Bonnie Tyler

The hurricane that struck Galveston caused one of the greatest catastrophes in world history. There were stories of amazing acts of heroism, each of which would amaze the rest of the world, but when compared to the storm, so intense in its fury, and so prolonged in its work of destruction, seemed minute and meaningless. But, the Galveston Flood is a story of heroes. After the storm, the island needed to relieve the stricken, grapple with and prevent the anarchist’s reign, clear the water-sodden land of putrefying bodies and dead carcasses, and perform tasks that would sicken the hearts of men (Greene and Kelly 47). Galveston would never be the same. Two years later, the people of Galveston began constructing a seawall to stretch for six miles along the Gulf side of the city, built with reinforced concrete and secured by pilings driven 40 feet into the sand. Later, the Galvestonians even raised the level of the island, along with 2146 buildings, and a 3000 ton church. In places near the sea-wall the island was raised almost 17 feet! In the end, however, while these structures have kept the people much safer, Galveston has not become what

it once was. With such competition from Houston close by, and the Spindletop oil boom in 1901, Galveston today has become a peaceful beach community, rather than the Octopus of the Gulf.

In comparison, with regard to heroes in most ancient flood stories, instructions are sent by God to the hero to build a craft, ensuring the survival of all species. This is most popularly illustrated in the Hebrew flood story with Noah. Because he tried to live righteously in such a wicked world, God was merciful to him and his family. Noah was given specific instructions about how he was to build a large ark – 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high (Gen. 6:16). Within the ark, Noah was to store his family, a male and female pair of every unclean animal and seven pairs of every clean animal (Gen. 6:19), along with enough food to feed them all. Noah completed all that he was commanded to do. The flood came and Noah with his precious cargo in tow was left to drift for several hundred days. Because of his obedience to God, a new less sinful people were able to repopulate the planet, creating a new hope civilization.

One daydream that almost all of us have had is to be a hero. The heroes of our daydreams vary; often, as we grow, our ideas of heroes develop and become more sophisticated. Some people say that heroes are born and not made, that heroism is a matter of fate, but if heroes are made, who – or what – “makes” them? Heroes in ancient societies can be called upon to illustrate both sides of this question. In one sense, heroes seemed to be determined, that is “made,” by a common understanding. Most people simply agreed that heroes were literally extraordinary, and performed astonishing deeds, far beyond the capabilities of the average person.

Hercules possessed superhuman characteristics and an extraordinary destiny from the moment of his birth. He simply could not have enacted the will of the gods had he not been half divine. And yet, because of his incredible nature, an aspect of himself over which he had no control, he was probably a hero to almost everyone in Ancient Greece.

Another ancient figure who seems almost more than human is Alexander the Great. In his various campaigns, Alexander and his men conquered territory from Greece to India, penetrating 14,000 miles to the east of Greece. Literally deified in his lifetime and dead at 33 in 323 BCE, reputedly Alexander wept because there were no more worlds to conquer and it would be centuries before anyone could begin to match his stature. Half god or not, Alexander’s heroism, on one level or another, can never be disputed.

However, heroes today are usually the average person. For example, during Hurricane Katrina in 2006, a man named Abdulrahman Zeitoun – who had emigrated from Syria decades earlier – traveled around the city of New Orleans for days rescuing neighbors until he was arrested under suspicion of terrorism. He and another Arab-American were imprisoned and held for weeks without charges (Vollen and Young 35, 109-111, 119). Anthony Letcher stood with his aunt on her porch surveying the same storm. As they watched the waters roll in, his aunt cried out, “Oh Lord Jesus! Look at those two babies down in that water, Lord!” Moments later, Anthony dove into the water to save the children (Vollen and Young 34, 77-80).

During the Galveston Storm, Daisy Thorne, a 23-year-old school teacher, read from the Bible to calm the one-hundred people cramped into one hotel room at the Tremont as the hurricane raged on outside. This room was the only one left standing after the storm (Greene and Kelly 79-83, 129-130).

LESSON PLANS

*“If I had 8 hours to chop down a tree, I’d spend
six of them sharpening my axe”
~ Abraham Lincoln*

Lesson One: Comparing and Contrasting Ancient Flood Stories

(This unit will take about one week. Each lesson is 45-50 minutes in length)

Objectives

Use critical thinking skills to evaluate primary and secondary source documents.

Introduction

This serves as an introductory lesson that provides an informational backbone for the rest of the curriculum unit and begins the comparison of the Galveston storm of 1900 with ancient floods. Students will read four ancient flood stories and then infer patterns similar in each. The students will then create their own flood stories for mythical cultures.

Class should begin with a discussion of floods and students’ personal experiences with floods. This should transition into a brief summary of the Galveston flood.

Guided Practice

After organizing students in heterogeneous groups of four, each student will read one the four flood stories provided. One of the flood stories should be represented in each group. Once everyone has finished reading, group members are to compare and discern patterns found in each other’s stories. Then, as a class, gather those patterns and agree upon a specific one found in all four stories: Gilgamesh, Mayans, Greco Romans, and Hebrew.

Next, the teacher will ask the students to create original flood myths that follow the agreed upon pattern. Students should share their products with the class.

Assessment

Write a flood story for a mythical civilization.

Materials

Handouts containing the information found in the Unit Background on the four flood stories: the Mayans, the Greco-Romans, the Hebrews, and the Sumerians.

Closure

Class should end with comparisons of ancient floods to the Galveston flood.

Lesson Two: Galveston Island and the Gods Fury: The Hurricane!

Objectives

- Identify a major era in Texas history, specifically the turn of the twentieth century, and describe its defining characteristics.
- Interpret maps, graphs, and charts to pose and answer questions about the Galveston flood.

Introduction

This lesson gives a historical background to Galveston Island, along with further extending the comparison of the ancient flood stories to the island. It will end with a brief informational slide show on the hurricane.

When the students arrive in class the flood story pattern agreed upon the class period before should be on the board along with the question, “What was the sin of Galveston?” Class brainstorms possible answers.

Guided Practice

The teacher should begin with a lecture about a divided history of Galveston Island. The teacher can use information contained within the curriculum unit. Once again, the teacher will return to the question and ask, “What was the sin of Galveston?”

The teacher should then introduce the term *hubris*, or the attitude of arrogant pride or presumption. Students should then offer examples of how hubris has affected historical events. Possible examples could be the sinking of the Titanic and the fall of the Roman Empire. The teacher will then ask for examples from the lecture on how Galveston was guilty of the sin of hubris.

Next, continuing the linear comparison to ancient flood stories, the teacher will introduce the punishment for the sin of Galveston – the hurricane of 1900. The teacher will then lead an informational lecture through an examination of the hurricane.

Assessment

Students will answer the guiding questions covering the PowerPoint presentation.

Materials

Notes

Closure

Students will reflect on their own lives and ask themselves, “Have I ever been guilty of hubris?”

Lesson Three: Twin Sisters: The Galveston Storm of 1900 and Hurricane Katrina

Objectives

- Identify a major era in Texas history, specifically the turn of the twentieth century, and describe its defining characteristics.
- Analyze the economic, social, and political impact of the Galveston flood.
- Interpret maps, graphs, and charts to pose and answer questions about the Galveston flood.
- Compare and contrast two historical events to gain unique perspectives.

Introduction

This lesson will serve as a comparison between the two storms that struck Galveston in 1900 and the Gulf Coast in 2006, along with further extending the comparison to the ancient flood stories.

Class should begin with the reading of an exceptionally rare unsigned letter written by a young woman employed at John Sealy Hospital. It is the only account known to have been written while the storm was taking place. This letter can be found in *Through a Night of Horrors: Voices from the 1900 Galveston Storm*.

Guided Practice

Students will begin comparing the storms, by plotting each one’s wind speed and path on a hurricane tracking chart. Next, students will read eye-witness accounts from survivors of each storm.

Students will then use these eye-witness accounts, along with their hurricane tracking charts to compare and contrast the two storms further. This can be done by creating a Venn diagram.

Assessment

Students will complete a hurricane tracking chart, illustrating wind speed and path of both hurricanes. Students will also complete a Venn diagram comparing the two storms.

Materials

Hurricane Tracking Charts, Eye-Witness Accounts, Venn Diagrams, letter from *Through a Night of Horrors: Voices from the 1900 Galveston Storm*

Closure

Students will return to the ancient flood stories and compare the preceding two storms with the ones contained within these myths. This could be a class discussion.

Lesson Four: I Need a Hero: Where Was Noah?

Objectives

- Use critical thinking skills to evaluate primary and secondary source documents.
- Compare and contrast two historical events to gain unique perspectives.

Introduction

This final lesson serves as an investigation into the Hero, along with further extending the comparison to the ancient flood stories. Using the eye-witness accounts of hurricane survivors, the students will collaboratively define the Hero. This lesson ends with each student pledging to act as a hero everyday.

Class should begin with a concept development over the idea of the Hero, followed by a discussion guided by the following questions:

1. Some people say that heroes are born and not made, that heroism is a matter of fate, but if heroes are made, who - or what - “makes” them?
2. Will a heroic person always behave as a hero?
3. How should we consider someone who surprises everyone with his or her heroism? What about the person who is expected to behave in a particular way? Is the heroic act quite separate from the person who performs it?
4. Can heroes really be heroes if only a certain group in a society call them heroes?
5. Can people who are noble and admirable in one aspect of their lives, but contemptible or immoral in other areas still be called heroes?

Guided Practice

In collaborative groups of 4-5, students will read or listen to eye-witness accounts from survivors of both storms and then write a journalistic piece, including an artist’s depiction, to read and display to the rest of the class.

The teacher will read from the book *Voices from the Storm: The People of New Orleans on Hurricane Katrina and Its Aftermath* two stories of heroism – one from Anthony Letcher and the other from Abudulrahman Zeitoun.

- Read aloud to the class about Anthony Letcher’s background – page 34.
- Continue with his act of heroism – pages 77-80.

REMEMBER: to proofread the material. At times Anthony will use inappropriate language for the classroom and should be edited by the teacher. Furthermore, proofreading will allow the teacher to shorten the reading if he/she desires.

- Read aloud to the class about Abudulrahman Zeitoun's background – page 35.
- Continue with his act of heroism – pages 109-111, and 119.

The teacher will now read from the book *A Weekend in September* the story of Daisy Thorne, survivor of the Galveston Flood.

- Read aloud to the class about Daisy Thorne - pages 79-83, 129-130.

REMEMBER: there are several stories of heroic feats during both tragedies. The teacher should feel free to use any of those stories that he/she desires. The previous are just examples.

After sharing within the group, the students will then decide by a vote, which articles best depict the heroic act described in the accounts.

The class should then use those articles to discuss the hero, while the teacher once again relates the heroes found in these articles to the heroes found in the ancient flood stories from the beginning of the unit.

Assessment

Student will create a journalistic piece, including an artist's depiction based on eye-witness accounts of both storms.

Materials

Eye-Witness Accounts, *Voices from the Storm: The People of New Orleans on Hurricane Katrina and Its Aftermath*

Closure

Students will end class pledging to act as heroes in their everyday lives.

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