

THE VISUAL MEDIUM IN THE HISTORY CLASSROOM

The discussion I am going to have today is nothing unique and has been used in many History classrooms and other subjects' classrooms.

However I do not think it has been explored as a teaching medium in a great deal before and it is this that I would like to present today.

The generation of pupil being taught today is a pupil who is firstly challenged by new strategies and secondly inspired by the visual medium. The old "chalk and talk" approach does not inspire (not that I think it ever inspired) or motivate the pupil of the 21st Century.

I will present two different visual medium examples:

1. The use of a dramatized History film ,ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT in Grade 8
2. The use of the overhead projector for a focus on APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA, in Grade 9.

1. ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT:

The Grade 8 Curriculum in the new learning Area of Human Social Sciences , calls for a focus on World War One and particularly the conditions and horrors of this particular war.

On reviewing this need I decided to find the best visual representation of this possible, it is easy to present pictures and give graphic descriptions but I do not think these strategies will be clear enough in portraying these horrors.

I was drawn to the film, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, as I remember seeing it as a child and how it had quite a profound impact on me. The version I saw was the colour production produced in 1979 and produced by Norman Rosemont and starring Richard Thomas, Ernest Borgnine, Donald Pleasence and Ian Holm.

Even though presented from a German perspective, the film based on the book by Erich Maria Remarque has portrayed the following events which I think all pupils of History need to know about when studying World War One:

- The transformation of a group of young men from glory and adventure seeking to war weary cynical old men.
- The use of nationalist speech to encourage enlistment.
- The physical hardships presented in the actual trenches, the rats and lice, the mud and the corpses and constant bombardment.
- The futility of going "over the top "into no mans' land and being killed for a few meters of land.
- The loss of friends
- The various types of weapons used to kill from machine guns to flamethrowers.
- The psychological and emotional impact on ordinary young men when having to kill other young men.

The process:

The intention was to not just simply show them a film filled with blood and gore but to try and get them to empathise with those who have had to live through an unpleasant experience like World War One and Trench Warfare.

I needed to develop an exercise that kept the necessary outcomes of enquiry, understanding and interpretation in mind and encourage the pupils to try and empathise with the soldiers presented in the film, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT.

The activity which was eventually formalized was a two part activity:

1. A diary consisting of four 100 word entries, similar to the type of diary Paul Baumer (the leading character and narrator in the film) would have produced.
2. A reflective piece whereby, the pupil will present his/her feelings and emotions on observing the horrors of war, in words.

Finally this was to be packaged in a creative and unique fashion presenting as best the area and theme being studied.

The two components and the presented package will each be assessed with the use of an assessment rubric which will be presented to the pupils beforehand to encourage transparency and preparation.

The actual activity with rubrics and instructions is attached.

Due to the length of the film, it is just over two hours in length and to prevent unnatural breaks due to 50 minute lessons and only two of these, separated by a number of days in a seven day cycle. I decided to utilize the school's activity week which has been put together for grade camps and day excursions.

I proposed a History day whereby the Grade 8 pupils would be presented with the activity as an entire grade and then as an entire grade they would watch the entire film in the school auditorium. Once they had viewed the film and after a ½ break they would then board buses to go to the South African Military Museum in Saxonwold where they would be given a second activity worksheet which would draw their attention to actual artifacts and displays from World War One, giving them an opportunity to see the weapons, uniforms and machines from the actual period under study.

This proposal turned out to be successful as it gave me an opportunity to interact with all the grade 8 pupils by:

- Presenting the activity to them and explaining all aspects of the activity.
- Encouraging the pupils to take notes throughout the viewing of the film and explaining to them that the notes have relevance as the film is examinable.
- Pausing the film and committing on various scenes and their relevance to the pupils' understanding of the period.
- Being present to facilitate any concerns or questions.

This Activity Week was at the end of the term and therefore the pupils were given a deadline date for the second week of the next term (5 weeks), more than enough time in which to complete the activity.

The finished product will be presented in September and I will attach or present some of the really good assignments.

My final comments on this assignment are:

- I believe the film was a success as the horrors and tragedies really affected some of the pupils when conversing with them after the film. The girls in particular made reference to the absolute waste of youth and the tragedy of war.
- The timing was perfect as the History Day, in the Activity Week was successful as it gave the grade 8s great exposure through the visual medium and the artifacts.
- It covered a number of assessment standards in the Revised National Curriculum :
 1. LO1-Enquiry skills – AS1 –evaluating sources
 2. LO1-Enquiry skills-AS2-presents an original idea as part of an answer.
 3. LO1-Enquiry skills-AS3-communicates knowledge and understanding by constructing own interpretation and argument.
 4. LO2-demonstrate historical knowledge and understanding-AS3-explains changes in a wider historical and environmental context.
 5. LO3-intepret aspects of History-AS2-constructs an interpretation based on sources.
 6. LO3-interpret aspects of History-AS3-analyses issues which influence the way History has been written.
- It created the perfect spring board for a focus on World War One, as once they return to the classroom and study the causes and effects and outcomes they will have a visual representation of the period in their minds thanks to the film and the museum visit.
- The pupils have been presented with meaningful resources on which to base their understanding of this period.

2. APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA:

The Grade 9 curriculum in the Learning Area of Human Social Sciences, calls for a study of the apartheid period in South African History.

On reviewing this need and listening to the pupils concerns about having to study this period once again. (It seems as if this has been a focus of study every second year in the senior phase of their schooling. This in itself could be the grounds for some research as it concerns me that an important period like this in South African History is being "done to death" and therefore it will lose its relevance through sheer lack of interest on the pupils' side). I decided to try and come up with a unique approach to this period of study which could bring another element into the area of study.

I decided utilize a visual medium as I wanted to breath some life into the period and at the same time provide them with some significant skills development.

The strategy I was drawn to was a verbal presentation utilizing the overhead projector, as this was a resource that they all had access to so leveling the field and encouraging them to develop the skills of research, interpretation and presentation through the use of a visual medium.

The plan was presented to them on an instruction and activity information sheet with the assessment instructions and rubric present.

The activity consisted of having to research two photographs which they feel symbolize the apartheid period or the period of transition from apartheid to Democracy.

Once they had identified the two photographs they had to:

Firstly present a written motivation for each with a brief description of the actual photograph and relevant aspects of the photograph in words.

Secondly select one of the photographs and then present on a transparency to the class in which they interact with the presented photograph and provide a brief verbal motivation and description.

The activity with instructions and rubrics is attached.

This strategy was successful as it covered a number of needs:

1. Brought a visual slant to the apartheid period.
2. Encouraged the pupils to research a very focused symbol of the apartheid period.
3. To present this focus they had to have a very good understanding of the apartheid period and the period of transition.
4. Allowed the pupils to work on their skills of research, interpretation and presentation.

The main problem encountered was the area of research and it seems if this is a common problem throughout a number of subjects.

In this particular activity two problems were encountered in the fact that a number of pupils really do not go to, too much trouble in finding relevant photographs to symbolize the period.

Firstly a number of pupils used the same photographs found on the internet through entering the word "apartheid" into the Google search engine.

Secondly, some pupils used photographs from other periods of hardship i.e. Israeli-Palestinian conflict and starvation in 19th Century India as the photograph of focus. This showed a lack of research skills as they did not broaden their net of resources available.

In conclusion and reviewing both tasks I did find the pupils far more stimulated and keen to get on with the task. The end result of the Grade 8, ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT, task is yet to be seen but judging from the interest and comments passed during the viewing of the film, I can confidentially say that they will generally be very sound assignments and my objective should be achieved: The pupils having a fair understanding of World War One and the impact on the young person of that period. The Grade 9 apartheid assignment, I am able to comment on as it has been completed and I do have some copies here. This assignment was unique to the pupils in the sense that it was the first time that they were all forced to use the same medium i.e. the overhead projector and therefore this definitely showed up those who have strong preparation and presentation skills and those who do not. The two areas that need to be addressed are the need for improved research skills (a problem area through out the school and therefore a whole school strategy is in the process of being developed) and improved presentation skills (this will be addressed in conjunction with the English department).

I do believe both tasks were successful. Therefore I will look to presenting the same tasks next year with the areas of attention addressed.