

Lesson Plan for the Digital Commonwealth Primary Sources Project

Project Title: Picturing Nativism in Antebellum Boston

Co-Taught by: Tia Esposito, Librarian and the Eighth Grade Teachers

School: Boston College High School Arrupe Division, Boston, MA 02125

Grade of Students that Lesson was Used with: 8th

Background Information for Project: On the Boston College High School web page there is one line that reads: “The school was founded to educate a burgeoning population of Irish immigrants during a period of bitter racial and religious hatred in the City of Boston.” This unit lesson plan began when our middle school was established three years ago (although the school was founded in 1863). We began to explore different ways in which the year-long study of immigration could be studied from a social justice aspect. Last year we began to use the Library’s videoconferencing distance learning center to hold DL programs on immigration with the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and it has just grown from this original program to include even more library resources.

Introduction

“One summer afternoon in 1839, at Cooperstown, on the shore of Otsego lake in upstate New York, the boys of the Otsego Academy were playing a game of town ball against Green’s Select School. The rules of town ball were so loose that every hit was fair, and boys sometimes ran headlong into one another.

That day, a resourceful young Otsego player named Abner Doubleday sat down and, on the spot, drew up the rules for a brand new game, and called it baseball.” –
Baseball: An Illustrated History, Ward and Burns

While this depiction of the first-ever baseball game in 1839 seems idyllic, at the same time in 1839 in major cities across the United States such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, nativist riots were breaking out due to tensions between nativists and Irish Catholic immigrants. This Unit Lesson Plan called “Picturing Nativism in Antebellum Boston” will investigate anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant sentiments specifically in antebellum Boston. Through visual culture and primary sources from the Digital Commonwealth website students will explore the reasons nativism emerged in Boston in the 19th century, and extrapolate to apply the lessons of the past to better understand the attitudes toward immigrants today. Students will come to

understand that Bostonians in the 19th century held strong anti-Catholic, anti-Irish, anti-immigrant sentiments for many of the same reasons that Americans today are conflicted about immigrants as evident in the case of the new Arizona Immigration Laws: because they were seen as non-white, worshipping a foreign religion, inherently violent, and taking away American jobs.

Each year eighth grade students do a year-long unit on immigration with emphasis on justice issues. In collaboration with the librarian, students participate in a videoconference with the National Baseball Hall of Fame called Diversity in the Dugout which explores immigration in the United States through the lens of baseball from the first European wave of immigration in the 19th and early 20th centuries when baseball began through modern day immigration issues. In an effort to incorporate library resources and research as a part of this cross-curricular lesson plan that explores anti-immigrant feelings during the 19th century and 20th century as reflected in the game of baseball, this lesson plan will use the game of baseball as a case study through which students learn about the reasons nativism emerges in American life, and how the students themselves can apply the lessons of history to critically understand and put into context the attitudes toward immigrants today.

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to investigate nativist feelings historically and understand the ways in which it continues today with contemporary immigrants, particularly after 9-11.

Negative attitudes toward immigrants are often brought about by other things happening in the society at the time. The causes are complex. Nativism takes a specific form in each era of American history and can be seen vividly through the lens of the game of baseball which by many is considered to be the Great American Past-time.

Baseball helped in many ways to breakdown social barriers and to create community pride, especially in Boston among the immigrant and working classes, though many in the upper echelons got involved in the sport as well. As A.G. Spalding once wrote, “The son of a President of the United States would as soon play ball with Patsy Flannigan... whether Patsy’s dad was a banker or boiler-maker would never enter the mind of the White House lad.”

Teachers should encourage students to understand the experience of the European 19th and 20th century immigrants to the Massachusetts commonwealth as a part of the larger story of discrimination toward new immigrants throughout American history. For example critics of immigration today often focus on issues of racial and religious difference as points of discomfort with new immigrants. Then, like now, immigrants were disliked because they were seen as people taking jobs away from native born Americans. Teachers should help students understand that 19th century and early 20th century Americans were uncomfortable with immigrants for many of the same reasons that Americans are uncomfortable with immigrants now: because they were seen as non-white, worshipping a foreign and corrupt religion, as inherently violent (sometimes even as terrorists), and as taking away native American jobs at a time of dramatic economic change. Comparisons for critical understanding can be made through the lens of the game of baseball, as after all, Baseball truly is the greatest American pastime, especially in Boston, especially at an all-boy’s high school.

Goals and Objectives

1. Students will examine primary source documents regarding the role of baseball in American culture for critical analysis.
2. Students will come to understand how baseball intersects with class, race, and nativist issues as an integral component of historical and cultural change in America.

Lesson Overview

Content Objectives

Students will make a connection between historic and contemporary nativism.

Skill Objectives

Students will learn how to use primary source documents and library resource for critical analysis while familiarizing themselves with library resources.

Teaching Time Required

3-4 class periods in the library.

Grade Level

8

Historical Periods

19th century, 20th century, and contemporary culture

Disciplines

history, civics and government, reading and writing

U.S. National Curriculum Standards

CIVICS

NSS-C.5-8.2/NSS-C.9-12.2 FOUNDATIONS OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

What are the Foundations of the American Political System?

- What are the distinctive characteristics of American society?
- What is American political culture?
- What values and principles are basic to American constitutional democracy?

NSS-C.5-8.3/NSS-C.9-12.3 PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY

How Does the Government Established by the Constitution Embody the Purposes, Values, and Principles of American Democracy?

- What does the national government do?
- How are state and local governments organized and what do they do?
- What is the place of law in the American constitutional system?
- How does the American political system provide for choice and opportunities for participation?

NSS-C.5-8.4/NSS-C.9-12.4 OTHER NATIONS AND WORLD AFFAIRS

What is the Relationship of the United States to Other Nations and to World Affairs?

- How has the United States influenced other nations and how have other nations influenced American politics and society?

NSS-C.5-8.5/NSS-C.9-12.5 ROLES OF THE CITIZEN

What are the Roles of the Citizen in American Democracy?

- What is citizenship?
- What are the rights of citizens?
- What are the responsibilities of citizens?
- What dispositions or traits of character are important to the preservation and improvement of American constitutional democracy?
- How can citizens take part in civic life?

U.S. HISTORY

NSS-USH.5-12.1 ERA 1: THREE WORLDS MEET (BEGINNINGS TO 1620)

- Understands comparative characteristics of societies in the Americas, Western Europe, and Western Africa that increasingly interacted after 1450
- Understands how early European exploration and colonization resulted in cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected peoples

NSS-USH.5-12.4 ERA 4: EXPANSION AND REFORM (1801-1861)

- Understands how the industrial revolution, increasing immigration, the rapid expansion of slavery, and the westward movement changed the lives of Americans and led toward regional tensions
- Understands the extension, restriction, and reorganization of political democracy after 1800
- Understands the sources and character of cultural, religious, and social reform movements in the antebellum period

NSS-USH.5-12.6 ERA 6: THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDUSTRIAL UNITED STATES (1870-1900)

- Understands massive immigration after 1870 and how new social patterns, conflicts, and ideas of national unity developed amid growing cultural diversity
- Understands the rise of the American labor movement and how political issues reflected social and economic changes

NSS-USH.5-12.7 ERA 7: THE EMERGENCE OF MODERN AMERICA (1890-1930)

- Understands how Progressives and others addressed problems of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and political corruption
- Understands how the United States changed from the end of World War I to the eve of the Great Depression

NSS-USH.5-12.9 ERA 9: POSTWAR UNITED STATES (1945 TO EARLY 1970s)

- Understands domestic policies after World War II
- Understands the struggle for racial and gender equality and the extension of civil liberties

NSS-USH.9-12.10 ERA 10: CONTEMPORARY UNITED STATES (1968 TO THE PRESENT)

- Understands recent developments in foreign and domestic politics
- Understands economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States

Activity 1. Introduction

“I see great things in baseball. It’s our game – the American game. It will take our people out-of-doors, fill them with oxygen, give them a larger physical stoicism. Tend to relieve us from being a nervous, dyspeptic set. Repair these losses, and be a blessing to us.” – Walt Whitman, 1846

Students will participate in a videoconference on immigration in the United States and cultural diversity in the Library’s distance learning center with the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY, called Cultural Diversity: Diversity in the Dugout.

For over 100 years the game of baseball has created many opportunities for players from around the world – showing the National Pastime to be more culturally diverse than ever before. The melting pot of cultures within baseball, however, does not come without hardship. Racism, discrimination and cultural differences combine to make life difficult for players of all backgrounds. But the game takes on unique flavors as players, fans, and cultures come together at the ballpark, leaving many of their differences behind.

In completing this lesson, students will: Examine historical data from various sources including museum and library collections, artifacts, primary sources, oral histories and web sites for life experiences of baseball players as they pertain to their time period and cultural background.

Analyze the geographic location of players and the effect their backgrounds had on the baseball team and the general culture of the stadium and community. Discuss various obstacles players faced on and off the field and how they overcame them.

Understand the impact of cultural diversity, location, and era affected a player’s ability to succeed.

Pre-Videoconference Program Classroom Activities

Discuss the ethnic population found in American cities such as Boston in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Examine a list of cities and countries in which current players were born. Identify these countries on a map. Complete definitions for the vocabulary words listed at the end of this unit using the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) online from the library resources page.

Post-Videoconference Program Assignment

Assign “[America’s National Game](#)” by Albert G. Spalding (1850-1915), “CHAPTER I. Why Base Ball Has Become Our National Game – Distinctively American As to Its nativity, Evolution, Development, Spirit and Achievements” pp 3-14, for students to read online in Google Books.

Activity 2.

“April 21, 1863. The parade ground has been a busy place for a week or so past, ball-playing having become a mania in camp. Officers and men forget, for a time, the differences in rank and indulge in the invigorating sport with a school-boys ardor.” – Private Alpheris B. Parker, 10th Regiment, Massachusetts (Civil War Soldier)

Introduction

Reviewing several primary source digital images pertaining to baseball in early Massachusetts, students will consider what attitudes citizens held about immigrants, situating these attitudes in the social and cultural contexts of the period.

Materials

Spalding, Albert G., *America's National Game*, New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1911. (Available online through Google Books)

Digital Commonwealth website (accessed 2012) : (Vintage High School Baseball Photographs)

Stereoview of Baseball Game – Lowell, MA <http://library.u.edu/clh/Lophoto/Sv12.jpg>



July 4th, 1889 Baseball Gathering
From the Public Library of Brookline

Citation: "July 4th Gathering." Photograph. 1889. *Digital Commonwealth*,
<http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/5425kj76x> (link checked 12/2015)



Swampscott High 1907

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Swampscott Schools

Citation: "Swampscott High School baseball team, 1907." Photograph. 1907. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/8283> (link checked 12/2015)



Swampscott High 1906

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Swampscott Schools

Citation: "Swampscott High School baseball team, 1906." Photograph. 1906. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/8282> (link checked 12/2015)



Baseball Team-Boys
From Beverly High School

Citation: "Baseball team - boys" Photograph. 1925. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/5425k970t> (link checked 12/2015)



Baseball Team-Boys
From Beverly High School

Citation: "Baseball team - boys.." Photograph. 1927. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/5425kb26g> (link checked 12/2015)



Swampscott High Baseball

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Swampscott Schools

Citation: "Swampscott High School baseball team, 1916." Photograph. 1916. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/8284> (link checked 12/2015)



Swampscott High Baseball

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Swampscott Schools

Citation: "Swampscott High School baseball team." Photograph. 1920. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/8286> (link checked 12/2015)



Swampscott High Baseball, 1915?

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Swampscott Schools

Citation: "Swampscott High School baseball team." Photograph. 1915. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/8285> (link checked 12/2015)



Philips Academy Baseball Team 1957

From NOBLE Digital Heritage, Collection: Alumni Project: Andover History in Photographs and Stories

Citation: "Phillips Academy Baseball Team 1957." Photograph. 1957. *Digital Commonwealth*, <http://heritage.noblenet.org/items/show/7721> (link checked 12/2015).



Boston College High School Archives website: (Vintage High School Baseball Photographs)

Boston College High School Archival Baseball Photos –
<https://www.bchigh.edu/podium/default.aspx?t=52562&a=65680&rc=1> (link checked 12/2015)



Teacher Preparation

Survey background readings on 19th century and early 20th century nativism.

Survey background readings on the history of baseball.

Survey background readings on Albert G. Spalding (1850-1915) -- professional baseball player for the Boston Red Stockings, considered finest pitcher in the game, leading his team to 4 pennants, instrumental in the founding of the American and the National Baseball Leagues, founder of the A.G. Spalding sporting goods company, whose baseballs are still being sold today.

Procedure

1. Discuss with students the chapter they read for homework on America's National Game. Point out the paragraph on page 6 which states: **"The genius of our institutions is democratic; Base Ball is a democratic game. The spirit of our national life is combative; Base Ball is a combative game. We are a cosmopolitan people, knowing no arbitrary class distinctions, acknowledging none. The son of a President of the United States would as soon play ball with Patsy Flannigan as with Lawrence Lionel Livingston, provided only that Patsy could put up the right article. Whether Patsy's dad was a banker or boiler-maker would never enter the mind of the White House lad. It would be quite enough for him to know that Patsy was up in the game."** Ask students if they think Albert Spalding chose the name "Patsy Flannigan" arbitrarily or if the name was chosen because of the anti-Irish sentiment of the time. Could the game of baseball have helped to break down social barriers and nativist feelings as Spalding suggests?
2. Students examine the primary source digital images of baseball in the late 1800's and early 1900s from Digital Commonwealth website and Boston College High School Archives website. Teachers will provide context for these images by sharing copies of newspaper articles printed from the time, which include anti-immigrant sentiments from library resources like ProQuest Newspapers.
3. Discuss as a class the patterns students identified in the texts of the newspaper articles and the photographs.
3. Explain that the attitudes expressed in the texts represent the attitudes of some mainstream Americans. How do these issues relate to some of the conditions of the period? Some of these conditions were: Social, Economic, Religious, Racial, Political.
4. Discuss as a class: Why would Americans have adopted such discriminatory attitudes? Where these attitudes justified? Why or why not? How did baseball help to change these attitudes?

Assignment:

After examining 19th century and 20th century primary source images and newspaper articles in the library, have students examine contemporary examples of attitudes toward a new immigrant group using images and articles from online newspapers, magazines and television and be prepared to discuss next class with examples.

Activity 3.

“Thanks to Base Ball – the entering wedge of the great reformation which has... taken place—we have been transformed into quite another people.”—Henry Chadwick

Introduction

Ethnic stereotypes have a long history in U.S. popular culture. Through the lens of baseball in Boston, examine the three major waves of immigration into the United States (European, Latin America, Asia).

Materials

PBS documentary on Baseball by Ken Burns “Shadow Ball and Inning 6”

Background Reading for Teachers:

[Baseball for Teachers, PBS.](#)

[Historic Baseball Cards 1887-1914, Library of Congress](#)

Ward, Geoffrey C. and Ken Burns. Baseball: An Illustrated History, NY: Knopf, 1994.

Procedure

Review homework assignment with students. Discuss with students how attitudes toward immigrants in the 19th century are similar and different from attitudes toward immigrants today. Examine issues of race, economics, and religion as key aspects of perceived difference. How do these attitudes affect the way immigrants are treated and the kinds of legislation and regulations the government enacts regarding immigration?

Students view Shadow Ball and Inning 6, the National Pastime from the Baseball series from PBS.

Discuss as a class the film.

Assignment

Assign a foreign-born baseball player (current or former) to each student and direct them to create a baseball card of that player. Include a picture of the player and address issues that may have been faced by this player in terms of experience or obstacles that the player faced.

Examples of actual baseball cards from the time may be found at the Library of Congress website: <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/bbhtml/bbhome.html>

Activity 4. (UNIT LESSON PLAN FINAL GROUP PROJECT)

“Mother may I slug the umpire, Slug him right between the eyes? If you let me do it, Mother, you shall have the champion prize.” – Chicago Tribune, 1886

Introduction

Students discuss point of view in historical narrative and generate their own narrative account of these events for a newspaper article on a baseball game in the late 1800s.

Procedure

a. Briefly review the events in the political, social, and economic context of the period. Points teachers should emphasize include: structural change in the American economy, rapid growth of population and industry in Boston, the ethnic make up of Boston, the rising tide of Irish Catholic immigration to Boston and BC High’s role as a school founded in 1863 “to educate a burgeoning population of Irish immigrants during a period of bitter racial and religious hatred in the City of Boston.” (Boston College High School HistoryWebsite)

b. Briefly review the role of baseball and situate it within the time.

c. Students role-play as the staff of the *Boston Daily Ledger*, a fictional 19th century newspaper in Boston, charged with reporting on a fictional baseball game between teams from the time of their choosing. Breaking the class into small groups, task each group with producing an article for the paper. Each group represents a newspaper staff group and each member accepts a staff position with the following assignments:

Staff reporter(s): write a blow-by-blow account of the game, including a description of what happened, mock interviews with major team players

Editor: write an op-ed piece about the newest “fad” or game of baseball in America, with reasons why they offer this position

Photographer/Illustrator: create images of the incidents and their aftermath and/or use image handout and couple these images with the appropriate articles. Develop appropriate captions. Could use images from Digital Commonwealth website or Library of Congress website.

Citizen letter to the editor: write a letter from a citizen supporting or condemning the newest sport of baseball. Multiple letters might be submitted in order to capture the perspective of a Native American party member, an Irish Catholic immigrant, a baseball player, etc.

d. After each student selects their role, they should discuss the details of the newspaper's layout. What will be the column size, font, etc.? After students have written a rough draft and peer edited their work, they should type their final draft according to the standards they agreed upon and assemble the paper in class.

e. Have students share their newspapers across each group and compare them. Discuss:

1. How do the editorials and accounts reflect the attitudes of the day?
2. How well did each group capture the feeling and attitudes of the past?
3. How would the subject of baseball or a particular game be covered in the media today?

Vocabulary

Culture

Discrimination

Diversity

Ellis Island

Emigrate

Ethnic

Foreign

Immigration

Integration

Know-Nothings

Melting Pot

Nativism

Obstacles

Racism

Stereotype

Resources For Teachers

On the Web

Spalding, Albert G., [*America's National Game*](#), New York: American Sports Publishing Company, 1911.

[Strangers In the Land of Strangers](#) online exhibit that looks at ways distinct groups have tried to claim and prove that they belong, and at the changing meanings of "American."

[Historic Baseball Cards 1887-1914, Library of Congress.](#)

[Baseball for Teachers, PBS.](#)

In Print

Anbinder, Tyler. 1994. *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850's*. Oxford University Press; Reprint edition.

Chavez, Leo R. 2001. *Covering Immigration: Popular Images and the Politics of the Nation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Dawidorr, Nicholas, ed. [*Baseball: A Literary Anthology*](#), NY: Library of America, 2002.

Higham, John. 2002. *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925*. Rutgers University Press.

Perea, Juan. 1997. *Immigrants Out!: The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States* (Critical America) New York University Press. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1995.

Thorn, John and Pete Palmer, eds. [*Total Baseball*](#) 2nd ed. NY: Time Warner, 1991.

Ward, Geoffrey C. and Ken Burns. [*Baseball: An Illustrated History*](#), NY: Knopf, 1994.

ASSESSMENT

Were your objectives achieved? If so, how? If not why not?

Students were introduced to the concept of nativism and the role that baseball played in breaking down social barriers that nativists had built up in antebellum Boston. The students now have an increased knowledge of the city of Boston's experience with nativism in the 19th century and have gained this knowledge using baseball as their lens to the time period. As a result, the students were very engaged.

How has this project changed your teaching practice and impacted student learning?

This unit lesson plan helped to reinforce the role of the library and the benefits of the library's resources not only for its books and its technology, but also for the primary sources and archival materials it can offer to our students. It was a fantastic way to use these visual primary sources to connect our students today with the students of the past here in Boston. As BC High was established in 1863, this project connected our students in a very real way with the past. Our school archive photographs of early BC High baseball teams were made available online for this project.

Explain how your project might be replicated in other schools and with other students at different grade levels and with different abilities and learning styles.

This unit lesson plan could easily be adapted for use at other middle and high schools especially schools such as Swampscott High School, Philips Academy, Lowell High School and the other schools for which Digital Commonwealth has archival photographs of school baseball teams from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

If possible please include samples of student work or project worksheets.

Please go to the school's website and search the media library for social studies or archives to see photos in albums

Originally completed 2012

Links updated December 2015