

COMPARING CANADIAN AND AMERICAN MEMORY OF THE WAR OF 1812

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Grade Level: 9-12

Time Frame: 1-2 class periods (45 minutes each)

Objectives:

1. Evaluate the historiography of the War of 1812
2. Compare an American textbook account of the War of 1812 with a Canadian textbook account.
3. Describe the important differences between the American textbook account of the War of 1812 with the Canadian textbook account (i.e. - each side describes different causes, atrocities, heroes, villains, and outcomes)

Common Core Literacy in History Standards:

1. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1](#) Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
2. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2](#) Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
3. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3](#) Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
4. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6](#) Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
5. [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9](#) Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Procedures:

1. Explain to the class that the War of 1812 has been called “the Rodney Dangerfield of wars,” in other words, it doesn’t get any respect. In the realm of American History, it is easily glossed over and does not receive much attention in most textbooks. College Humor lampooned our limited collective knowledge of this event with a spoof preview for a film about the War of 1812. Show the class the College Humor film clip to drive home the point that the U.S. collective memory of the War of 1812 is incredibly shallow.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2AfQ5pa59A>
2. Introduce the central investigative question to the class: “How do American and Canadian accounts of the War of 1812 differ?” Begin the investigation by analyzing your students’ U.S. History textbook account of the war. Here is a sample of [James West Davidson’s America: History of Our Nation textbook account of the War of 1812](#). Ask students to consider the following questions when they read their U.S. History textbook:
 - a. According to the text, what are the causes of the War of 1812?
 - b. What terms or adjectives does the author use to describe the various groups who participated in the war (ex. Americans, Canadians, British, Native Americans)?
 - c. Are there any heroes in the War of 1812? Any villains?
 - d. Were there any atrocities committed during the war?
 - e. Who were the winners and losers in the War of 1812?
3. In most American textbooks, British impressment of sailors, British restriction of American trade and British support of Native Americans on the frontier are usually cited as the main causes in the War of 1812. Andrew Jackson and Commodore Perry emerge as heroes and the British soldiers involved in the destruction of Washington, D.C. make for menacing villains. A majority of American textbooks usually downplay the terms of

the Treaty of Ghent and end their narrative with Jackson's victory at New Orleans and the subsequent rise of nationalism, which make the war seem like a last-minute victory for the United States.

4. After students have an opportunity to share their interpretation of the American textbook, transition into studying [the Canadian textbook account](#). Use the same set of questions to deconstruct the Canadian account. A few key differences usually emerge as students encounter a new point of view:
 - a. The Americans are described as the aggressors and invaders.
 - b. The Canadians are the clear victors – they successfully defended their country against the American invaders.
 - c. Isaac Brock and Laura Secord are Canadian heroes
 - d. Washington, D.C. was only destroyed as retaliation after the Americans destroyed York (present day Toronto).
5. Wrap up the lesson in a humorous way, by having students listen to a Canadian song about the War of 1812: [The Arrogant Worms "War of 1812 Song"](#). The songs re-emphasizes a lot of the main points in the Canadian textbook and also extends the lesson into modern times in a unique way. Students could use the same set of questions to critically analyze the song.
6. The big idea that I try to drive home with this lesson is that students need to read all sources with a critical eye. They need to understand that their textbook is only one interpretation of an international event. Reading international accounts of events, can provide us with a much broader understanding of a topic.

References:

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- Lindaman, Dana and Ward, Kyle. *History Lessons: How Textbooks from Around the World Portray U.S. History*. The New Press. June 1, 2004. Pages 53-56.