

Lesson Plan Ideas:

Letters From Rifka

Journal

Objective

Students will demonstrate their understanding of how people feel when they are forced to leave their homes and countries.

Procedure

1. Ask students to visualize a place they love while thinking about these questions: “How do you feel when you are in your favorite place?” and “How would you feel if you were forced to leave that place and never go back?” Give students time to think. Then have them share ideas.
2. Ask students to discuss the things their families would have to do if forced to leave home forever. Students could discuss what new things they would have to learn - language, culture, and so on and what things their family would bring with them. Part of this could be a discussion of a move they have made in the past.
3. Journal: Students respond in a journal based on their ideas from discussion.

Mapping

Objective

Students will map the migration of their family to another country.

Procedure

In *Letters From Rifka*, Rifka and her family travel to many countries before arriving in the United States.

1. Have students use a blank world map to trace the journey of Rifka and her family. For each country Rifka visits, have students label that country on the map. Then have students briefly research each country and provide relevant information - country, capital, language, population, and so on. Students can write results on a separate paper to be turned in with the map.
2. Students research their own family's migration to America or another country. Students should talk with family members to gather information about their family's history and then trace on a world map their journey. Basic interviewing skills can be taught as a basis for this lesson if students have to interview family members to gather information. Again, students can write a brief description of each move, including which family members were a part of that move. Students can describe where they were born, where they moved, and what adjustments they had to make when they moved. Students can compare their adjustments to the ones Rifka had to make.

Time Line

Objective

Students will demonstrate understanding of major events in the book by making a representative time line.

Procedure

Periodically through the reading of the book, students will describe what they feel are the major events of the book in a journal. After finishing the book, students should transfer their ideas to an events page. On the events page, students title the event and provide a brief description and an illustration (if applicable). Then students create a time line using string, paper, etc., based on their event titles and dates from the book. The time line plus the events page can constitute the final project.

Carousel

Objective

Students will work in collaborative groups to gain a better understanding of *Letters From Rifka*.

Procedure

Teachers choose four open-ended questions for student exploration. The teacher posts each question on butcher paper and tapes these papers in four corners of the room. The teacher reads the questions and gives students an opportunity to think silently about responses. Divide class into four groups. Groups go to corners, and each group must decide who will be the recorder and who will be the reporter. Students will have a short time to brainstorm responses to questions and write answers on the paper. The recorder is responsible for writing. Then the groups switch to a new question in the next corner, repeating the process. The only rule is that groups can't duplicate ideas of the previous groups thereby adding to the information instead of repeating. After students have answered all questions, the reporter will report to the class all responses to questions. Questions for Rifka could be, *What prejudices to you see in the book? What are some examples of how people depend on each other as they did in the book, and What do you appreciate about living in the United States?*

Vignette

Objective

Student will portraiture a member of their family they respect.

Procedure

In the book, Rifka describe her father as the bravest man she has ever known. Students should think about this and decide on a person they admire and respect. Then students, if possible, should interview that person for 30 minutes. Scaffolding skills could include learning to create interview questions, learning how to take notes during an interview, learning how to quote spoken words/paraphrasing, and so on. After the interview, students should write a 3 page portraiture of their person. The portraiture should include a description of why they admire the person, backed up by evidence from the interview.

Research Project: Cultural Comparison

This is a collaborative project done best with a team of teachers/students.

Subjects Covered: Social Studies, Language Arts, Math, Computers/Technology

Objective

Students will gain knowledge of a foreign country/culture and compare/contrast that country/culture to the culture of their school.

Procedure

Students will study in-depth one of the countries/cultures that Rifka visits on her journey to America as compared to their own school culture (If the focus is only Russia, then just study Russia.) Based on the reading and a class discussion of the book, students break into teams of two or three to research a question they want answered about a foreign culture of their choosing and their school culture. To incorporate math in this project, students should pick a quantitative question that they want answered by their own student body and that they can research about another country.

“Favorite/Popular” questions work well. For example, students could ask, “What is your favorite/What is the most popular holiday?” or “What is your favorite/What is the most popular breakfast food?” or “What is your favorite/What is the most popular type of music?” The “favorite” part of the question they will ask their peers, and the

“popular” part of the question they will research about their foreign country/culture.

The point of asking quantitative questions is that students can learn math skills related to data gathering and analysis. To answer the “favorite” part of the question specifically, groups will sample their peers in the school. To do this, students need to understand how to make a questionnaire and understand the concept of random sampling. When they have sampled their peers, they will enter the data into Excel and create graphs, histograms, etc. to show the most popular answers. To answer the “popular” part of the question, students will use various research methods - books, Internet, etc. to learn about their foreign cultures. The answers won't be quantitatively specific, but the students should get a good idea about their question.

For example, if a question is “What item/things do you spend the most money on?” students can sample 100 students in the school and gather quantitative results - music, clothes, entertainment, and so on. However, if researching the question of what do Russian teens spend their money on, students might not be able to find quantitative data, but they can get a general idea of the answer through research.

When students have completed their research, they can create PowerPoint presentation to present to classmates. Each presentation should include 5-6 slides:

1. What foreign culture are you studying?
2. What is your research question?
3. How did you gather your data from your peers and about your foreign culture?
4. What are the results? Results can be graphs from Excel pasted into PowerPoint. Compare and contrast results.
5. Conclusion. What do the findings say about each culture?
6. Reflection. How would you do your research differently next time? What worked? What didn't work? Why?

Students can take notes while other groups present and even grade the other groups. The group with the highest score could do a presentation for the whole school or parents, or other groups. There could also be a quiz/test based on the information gathered.

It would be great to just research Russia - with each group focusing on a different question. The results would give a nice comprehensive look at Russian culture, particularly youth culture. This would be motivating for students.

Estimated time of project: 2 weeks to read the book, 2-3 weeks to complete the project.