

8th Grade Social Studies

"Adopt A Dead Person" Project Guidelines

Overview:

In October, we went on a day-long fieldtrip to three local cemeteries, where we mapped and took pictures of interesting graves. Each class picked a "dead guy" to write a biography of. I spent a couple of months collecting as much information as I could from primary sources. Now it is time for you to get started on the project. You will have about two and a half weeks to work on it. You will be working on it in both Social Studies and Literacy and you will be given time in school to work on your projects, but it is up to you to keep yourself organized and on schedule, each step of the way. (See enclosed calendar.)

Step #1 - Brainstorming:

In class, we will review what we know about your "dead guy" and make a chart on the board. We will list everything we know and everything we want to know. From that chart, we will make a list of topics that students can do projects on. For homework, you will write me a letter listing your top three choices for topics that you want to do your project on. If you feel very strongly about one of them, tell me why you think that is the right topic for you. This homework assignment will be due the next day at homeroom, not in Social Studies class. (This is so that Ms. Barnes and I can look them over and give you your assignments by class time.) This is listed on your calendar.

Step #2 - Coming Up With Questions:

After you have gotten your topic assignment, you will have to come up with good questions relating to that topic. It is not enough to say, "I want to know about what he did in the War". You need to be specific - are you interested in how he spent his time when he wasn't fighting? What about that interests you? Are you more interested in what battles he fought in? Why? What can we learn about our "dead guy" from that? Are you interested in the weapons he used? What specifically are you interested in? Why?

This sounds complicated and confusing, but don't worry. We will cover this in class; there is also an example of this process in this packet.

For homework, write 10-15 good questions about your topic that you want to answer in your project. These should be solid, well thought-out questions that will help you develop a kick-butt project. Do not put easy questions on your list, just to fill it up to the required

number. This list is due the next class. (See calendar.) You will share your list with the rest of the class, so other students can be inspired by your ideas.

Step #3 - Research, Research, Research!

You already have a pretty good working knowledge of how to do research - you've already done several research projects in Social Studies and Literacy, so you are ready to take your research to the next level. In class, we will discuss research strategies, note-taking, plagiarism and writing bibliographies. You will be required to use note-cards for this project. (Go ahead and groan now, complaints will not be accepted later.) For examples of research strategies and how your note-cards and bibliographies should look, see the handouts included in this packet.

After you have researched your topics for a few days (see calendar), you will conference with other students for peer-review. That means that you will have someone look over your notes and you will look over theirs. This is so that you can get an outside opinion on what you should be doing with your research. If you're doing great, your partner can tell you, so that you know to go on doing whatever it is that you've been doing. If you need some ideas about where you can improve, your partner can provide that too. You will do a super-duper-spectacular job at doing the same thing for your partner.

Researching our "dead guy" isn't going to be easy. This is not one of those projects that teachers set up with definite right or wrong answers and definite places to look for information. This is real-life historical research and you will need to use your brains. Don't give up if you run into problems finding information. Ms. Barnes and I are here to help you. This is research that will help the entire town of Deerfield, so please take it seriously.

Step #4 - Picking a Format

Okay, so now that you've gotten into the research and started to find some really good information, it's time to think about how you are going to present that information. What kind of format will you use to let people know what kind of person your "dead guy" really was?

Yes, you can write a paper. That would be a very effective way of conveying information and is totally acceptable. On the other hand, there are other ways of transmitting the information you've found out. Here are some of the other formats you are allowed to choose from:

- A brochure
- A narrative poem
- A found poem
- An "ABC" book
- A realistic, fictional newspaper story
- A series of digital video clips
- Fiction about a day in his life
- An epic song
- Interviews with experts
- A graphic novel (comic book)
- Annotated maps
- Annotated charts and graphs

All formats must involve a lot of written work. There are no easy, non-writing options.

Once again, you will write a letter to me, describing what format you would like to use for your project and why. Explain why that format would be especially good at getting your particular subject across. You will do this for homework and turn it in the next day at homeroom. (See calendar.)

Step #5 - Turning In Your Notes

The reason you have to turn in your notes is so that Ms. Barnes and I can measure the progress of your research and see if you are heading in the right direction. We can make suggestions and help steer you toward better resources. The notes will be returned to you by the next class. (See calendar for due dates.)

Step #6 - Your Final Project

When you turn your final project in, we will take a look at it as a class. It will be checked and graded, then uploaded to the Adopt A Dead Person Project website. By the end of the year, the site should be fantastic. We will produce this year's "Dead Person" project as a CD-ROM version of the website which will be presented to the Deerfield Historical Society and the public library in town. Because this will be seen and read by a much wider audience than just our class or our school, your very best work is expected.

Appendix #1

Coming Up With Questions About Your Topic

Why do I have to come up with questions? Why can't I just research and write my topic on my own?

The whole purpose of the Adopt A Dead Person project is to find out what the life of a particular person was like over a hundred years ago. The topic you have picked is a fairly broad one; it has to do with one, fairly large part of your "dead guy's" life. To make this a really informative and useful project, you need to touch on some of the smaller details. These questions make sure that you don't forget to cover your topic in detail.

What do you mean by questions? I can't think of any questions! This is stupid!

First, take a deep breath. Believe it or not, this will really help you when it comes to the writing part of this project. Think of this as an investment; you are putting in a little extra work now to save yourself a lot of work later on.

Okay, now let's look at how to come up with questions. You want to think about your "dead guy" as a real person that you want to know better. If you meet a new person in real life (one who is alive), how do you get to know him or her better?

By asking questions, right?

You want to find out what they like and what they do for a living and what kind of food they eat - stuff like that. By asking those same kinds of questions about your "dead guy", we can understand his life better.

Could you give me an example? *(Maybe he'll give me questions that I can rip off and I won't have to do any real thinking. Tee hee hee.)*

Okay, let's suppose that you are researching a woman named Fern, who lived in Deerfield in the 1800s. We know from the graves around hers in the cemetery and from the town records that she had at least four children - Bertha, Ethel, Waldo and Gertrude. You have chosen the topic, What Was It Like To Be a Mother In Deerfield In the Late 1800s? That's a really interesting topic, but it's pretty non-specific. If you just stick with that one big question, you'll probably come up with an answer like, "It was nice".

That doesn't help us much. Let's think about specific questions that you can ask about being a mother back then:

Well, first of all, how did she get to be a mother? (Aside from the obvious, I mean.)

- How old was she when she had her first baby?
- Was she married?
- Had she been pregnant before? Because of poor medical care and bad nutrition, many women miscarried - in other words, the baby would die before it was born. Had this happened to Fern?
- Would Fern have done anything special to take care of herself when she was pregnant? How would that be different from a woman today?
- What would the experience of giving birth have been like? Would she have gone to a hospital or had a doctor come to her or used a midwife or what?
- Did she die in childbirth? Lots of women back then did. Is that how she ended up in the cemetery?

See - that's six questions that would be really interesting, even before she's been a mother for five minutes. Now, what else can we ask to find out what it was like for her to be a mother. Think about your own mother.

- How did she punish her kids when they misbehaved? (You probably won't be able to find a specific answer to this question, but you'll certainly be able to find general information about how women at that time treated their kids and what the philosophy of motherhood was back then.)
- Did she have any help? Raising children is hard work. Did she do it by herself, or did she have a servant to help her? Did her mother live close by? How about her mother-in-law?
- Did she and her husband (if there was one) have enough money to feed and cloth their children well? What about presents and treats?
- What did her children call her? Mom? Ma? Mama? Mammy? Hey You?
- Did any of her children die? Did lots of them die? (That happened to a lot of parents.)
- If so, why did they die? Was there a disease going around? Did they die from accidents?
- Also, if some of her children died, what would that have been like? We always think of parents today dying before their children. If a mother kept losing children, would she still be as sad, or would she just accept it as "one of those things" and move on with her life?
- How would her children have treated her when she was old?

This is just an example, of course. Your questions are going to be very different.

Note - As you do your research, there is a good chance that you will find some really important information that you haven't included in your questions. Don't ignore it just because it isn't on your list. Go ahead and put it in your notes.

Here is an example:

<http://www.babyzone.com/features/content/display.asp?ContentID=1001>, 23 March, 2003

What was it like to give birth in the 1800s?

In England in the 1800s, almost all women gave birth at home with the help of a midwife or a "man midwife" - not a doctor. These midwives didn't have any formal training, but had learned how to deliver babies from their mothers or other midwives. They often gave drugs like opium to the women. Many women died because the midwives didn't know what they were doing.

You will notice that the information we found discusses childbirth in England, not in New Hampshire. It is reasonable to assume that women would have done things in more-or-less the same way in both places, but you would have to address that point when you wrote the project.

Appendix #3

How To Do Research

Rule #1: Do **NOT** take all your information from the internet!!!!

The internet is a fantastic tool. I admit it - it is one of the first places I look for fast and easy information. But it is only one of many, many tools available to you. Because you are doing an original research project - it is likely that nobody has ever done this same project before - there are very few fast and easy answers to your questions. You will have to look in history books, primary sources, encyclopedias, old newspapers and a wide variety of other sources, including interviews with experts. Do not expect to look something up online that will solve all your research problems.

Rule #2: See Rule #1

Rule #3: No, really - read it again and take it seriously. You'll save yourself a lot of frustration later on.

Rule #4: Be patient when you are using primary sources.

We have some excellent primary sources available to us for this project, including: military records, pension paperwork and wills and other probate documents. These are going to be very useful, but are a little hard to read. They are from a time before typewriters were common, so they are written by hand. Also, the information you are looking for will not be labeled, "**Hey Kid, Look Here**". You will have to look through a lot of information which is not useful to you in order to find the good stuff. Do not read one or two pages, then give up. You need to be very patient. Think of it like being a ninja - you get to do cool, exciting stuff, but only after a lot of boring, difficult preparation work.

Rule #5: Make up a list of key words.

Make up a list of words that will help guide your research. For instance, if you were looking up what it was like to have a baby in Deerfield in 1890, you will not find an entry in the encyclopedia titled, "*What It Was Like to Have a Baby in Deerfield in 1890*". You won't find a website with that title. There won't be a book with that title. However, if you make up a list of words or phrases that are related to that subject, you can probably find a good piece of information that will help you.

Example: Let's stick with poor Fern, our hypothetical "dead person". If you are looking for information about what childbirth would have been like for her, a list of key words might include the following terms:

- history
- childbirth
- 1800s
- New England
- doctor
- Deerfield
- New Hampshire
- midwife
- medicine
- baby
- 1872 (let's assume that's when her first baby was born)

If you need help coming up with a list of key words, any of your teachers will be happy to help you. You should also ask other students if they've had good luck with any particular key words.

Rule #6: Share information

Feel free to share information with each other. If you find a great piece of information that you know will help someone else in the class, feel free to pass it on. It is even possible that two or more of you might use the same piece of information in different ways. That's fine.

THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT YOU CAN COPY EACH OTHER'S PROJECT!!!!!!!!!!

Rule #7: Use search engines efficiently

If you do use the internet to do some of your research, use search engines like google.com or dogpile.com effectively. Type in combinations of key words, not whole questions. If you are looking for a particular phrase or combination of words, put those words in quotation marks when you are searching. (see enclosed Google tip sheet).

Remember - when you do find good information, you didn't find get it from Google. Google is just the search engine that helped you find the site where you *did* get the information. Do **NOT** list "google" as a source in your bibliography.

Rule #8: See Rule #1

Appendix #4

How To List Sources in Your Bibliography

Book:

Name of the author, Title of the Book, Year it was written, City it was published in,
Name of the publisher

Example:

Hammerton, A. James, Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in 19th Century Married Life, 1992, New York, Rutledge

Books Without an Author: (like an encyclopedia)

Name of the book, Edition, Topic title

Example:

Encyclopedia Americana, 1995 ed., "childbirth"

Website:

Name of the Author (if available), Name of the webpage where you found the
information, URL (the address), Date you accessed the information

Example:

Brown, Leah M., "Parenting Through History: You've Come a Long, Long, Way, Baby",
<http://www.babyzone.com/features/content/display.asp?ContentID=1001>, cited 23 March, 2003

Newspaper or Magazine Article:

Name of Author (if available), Title of the Article, Publication, Date published

Example:

"Deerfield Woman Dies, Leaves 13 Children, 37 Grandchildren", *Manchester Evening Union*, 5 May, 1911