

Imperial Frameworks Handout



Teaching Idea 28

Imperial Frameworks

Goal: Students analyze books and media to see if imperial frameworks continue to affect their ideas.

Procedures: Does the imperial framework still shape ideas, books and media today? Students can test these ideas by examining the mainstream academic knowledge of their school or community. They could also compare scholarly publications or texts from previous generations with those of today. In deciding what should serve as data for analysis of mainstream academic knowledge, teachers could choose to focus on academic scholarship (textbooks, journals) in libraries and museums or include popular knowledge through trade, business or government documents, cultural or leisure attractions (theme parks, plays, exhibitions, fairs, circuses), and media (newspapers, TV, films, music, cartoons). Below is a checklist students could use in their inquiry.

Does an Imperial Framework Live On?

1. Is there a portrayal of "The Other" (people of color in the U.S. or peoples in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East) based only upon European or American perceptions and scholarship?
2. Are there unstated assumptions that Americans or Europeans are superior to people of other cultures? Or is it implied that those "people over there" would be better off if they were more like Americans?
3. Is learning structured to focus on differences between Americans and other cultures?
4. Are people in the other cultures portrayed as ignorant, amusing, violent, exotic or bizarre?
5. Do people in other countries appear as backdrops for American or European experiences, decisions, wars, and other actions? Are people in other cultures less frequently named or treated with much less attention, voice, or complexity of character?
6. Are there justifications for European imperialism in Africa, the Americas, Asia, the Middle East? Is it implied that whites had the right to take land away from people of color, segregate them, tax them, move them or take their resources?
7. Is it implied that racism or imperialism ended long ago and no longer exists today?
8. Do people who suffered from, resisted or overcame imperialism, colonialism, or other acts of discrimination receive little attention?
9. Are culture or nationality linked to racial differences or ethnic purity?
10. Is colonial or imperialist literature used (Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, for example)? Is colonial or imperialist language used (such as oriental, bushman, pygmy)? And are there assumptions of superiority (rationalizations for imperialism as in manifest destiny)? Are the language, literature, and perspectives of colonized peoples present?

Source:

Merryfield, M. M., & Wilson, A. H. (2005). *Social studies and the world: teaching global perspectives*. Silver Spring, Md.: National Council for the Social Studies, p. 62