



## **Envision's Classroom Ideas for Making History Come Alive**

### **Grade Levels: Middle School, High School**

#### **"I couldn't have said it better myself" – 3 Historical Writing Exercises**

1. Historical Journalism – Assign your students to write a newspaper article covering an event from the period of time you're studying.
2. Historical Diaries – Ask your students to imagine they are students in the period of time you're studying. What would an entry in their personal daily journal look like?
3. Historical Speeches – Assign your students to write a persuasive speech that a famous historical figure might have given – either to the public, or to his/her buddies. This exercise also helps your students develop the art of persuasion, and, if the students present their speeches to the class, will develop important public speaking skills.

#### **What Would YOU Do?**

History is influenced by the acts and decisions made by the men and women of the time. Students can best understand these influences when they put themselves in the place of those people. Assign your students to take the roles of various characters living at pivotal points in history and answer the questions: What would you do? Why (or why not)?

Examples of the students' historical decisions:

- You are a statesman in Massachusetts, New York or South Carolina in 1775. Would you lobby in favor of independence from Britain?
- You are a young Jewish person in the 1940's. Would you fight to establish the State of Israel on Palestinian land?
- You are a successful business person living in New York in 1860. Would you put your family in a covered wagon and strike out for California or Oregon?
- You are a young adult in Russia in 1917. Would you fight to overthrow the Czarist autocracy and support the rise of Communism?
- You are a citizen in the Commonwealth of Virginia in 1859. Would you join John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry?

Your students' answers can be formatted as a written report, or as an oral presentation for the class.

#### **Acting Out**

Are your students ready to get up out of their chairs and move around? Let them bring history to life at the same time, by acting out a pivotal scene from the period of time you're studying. Ask for volunteers to play the key historical figures from this era, or assign them to specific roles in which you think they could shine. When the familiar figures have been assigned, ask the remaining students to imagine what



other types of people would have been involved in this historical activity, and take on their own imagined persona. Instruct them to stay true to the events and beliefs of the time, but let them exercise their creativity!

### Seeing Is Believing – List of Historical Attractions and Museums

History comes alive at several noted museums and historical attractions throughout America. Find one near you and take your students to explore history outside of the classroom. Here are some of our favorite sites. Refer back to the blog for web links.

- [Plimoth Plantation](#) in MA – Experience life as an American Pilgrim in Plimoth’s outdoor living exhibits, including the 17th-Century English Village, Wampanoag Homesite, the Plimoth Grist Mill and Mayflower II
- [Harpers Ferry](#), WV – At this National Historic Park, the setting for John Brown’s raid, your students can step back in time and experience [Living History Workshops](#)
- Civil War Reenactments – These exciting and historical reenactments take place in almost every state that was involved in the Civil War. Some of the most notable include:
  - [Gettysburg](#)
  - Battle of [Anderson, SC](#)
  - Battle of [Bull Run](#), Manassas, VA
  - [Shiloh](#), TN
  - [Antietam](#), MD
  - Find complete listings of upcoming 2016 reenactments on these handy websites:
    - <http://www.civilwarnews.com/events/calendar.php>
    - <http://civilwar.travel/mobile/>
- [Boston](#) offers a plethora of historic attractions, including the [Freedom Trail](#)
- And of course, all students should try to visit our nation’s capital: [Washington D.C.](#)!
- [Historical Festivals](#) – Your students will enjoy this wild collection of events, celebrating everything from the Renaissance to Steampunk to Sherwood Forest
- The National Park Service – Offering a rich variety of teacher’s resources, including the [National Register of Historic Places](#)
- Click here for a great list of the [Best History Museums in the U.S.](#)

### Best Historical Movies and Documentaries

Movies can teach us a lot, while evoking excitement and emotion. Show your students some of these acclaimed films and documentaries. Web links are available in the original blog.

- [Mighty Times: The Legacy of Rosa Parks](#) – A documentary depicting the life and times of an inspirational central figure in the national crusade against discrimination, and how that fight changed the world.
- [All Quiet on the Western Front](#) – One of the first and most memorable war movies, this classic Best Picture winner about World War I was first released in 1930. It was based upon the timeless novel by Erich Maria Remarque.



- [Liberation](#) – Featuring popular actors Patrick Stewart and Whoopi Goldberg, this dramatic historical documentary depicts the World War II Allied effort to defeat Nazi forces in Europe and liberate the captives in concentration camps.
- [All the President's Men](#) – *The Washington Post* says, “No film blends the elements of journalism and Washington intrigue more compellingly than ‘All the President’s Men,’ the story of two Washington Post reporters who helped take down the #1 resident on Pennsylvania Avenue, transforming both politics and journalism.”
- [Braveheart](#) – This epic movie depicts life in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and William Wallace, the warrior who led the Scots in the First War of Independence against King Edward I of England.
- [Hotel Rwanda](#) – Sometimes referred to as an “African Schindler’s List,” this film explores genocide, political corruption, and the repercussions of violence, as it recounts the story of Paul Rusesabagina’s efforts to save the lives of more than a thousand refugees during the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.
- [Casablanca](#) – No one should miss this classic from 1942, set in the unexpected location of Morocco, against the backdrop of World War II
- [Dr. Zhivago](#) – Another award-winning classic that will teach your students about both World War I and the Russian October Revolution/Civil War.