Title: Students’ Response to 9/11—A Documentary Report

Grade Level: Middle/High School

Objectives: Document their classmates’ reactions to 9/11 to gain a perspective on the variety of responses people had to the tragedy. Research the national reaction to 9/11 by examining polls and government actions.

National History Standards:
Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation; Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities; Standard 5: Historical Issues—Analysis and Decision-making; Era 10:1: Recent developments in foreign policy and domestic politics; Era 10:2: Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States.

Time: 90 minutes

Background:
September 11 was a modern-day tragedy of immense proportions. The devastating attacks by al Qaeda terrorists inside the United States killed some 3,000 people and sparked an American-led war on terrorism. The repercussions of that day will impact domestic and international political decisions for many years to come.

At 8:46 a.m. on September 11, 2001, a passenger jet flew into the north tower of the World Trade Center in New York. Fire and rescue crews rushed to the scene. As live TV coverage began, horrified viewers watched as a second plane slammed into the south tower at 9:03 a.m. Thirty-five minutes later a third airliner crashed into the Pentagon. Another jet bound for Washington, D.C., crashed in Pennsylvania after its passengers challenged the hijackers. The nation reeled. But Americans resolved to fight back, inspired by the words of a passenger who helped foil the last attack: “Are you guys ready? Let’s roll.”
“Our school is near the World Trade Center. I had paused in front of my section when a shudder shook the building.”

—William Frankenstein, student, New York City
Materials:
- Link to comment cards from Smithsonian September 11 exhibition: http://www.911digitalarchive.org/smithsoniancards

Lesson:
Working with partners or in small groups, students will document the American public’s changing feelings toward 9/11. They will also research young people’s reaction to the attacks. The bibliography at the end of the manual recommends some helpful sources.

First, ask the students to review the data from the post-9/11 polls, paying particular attention to statistics on how the nation felt about the following: going to war, terrorism, the way President Bush was doing his job, concerns for their own safety. Next, have them browse the exhibit cards of under-18 teens in the collection on the Smithsonian’s September 11 website. They can do this by clicking on “advanced search” and limiting the search to include only teens’ answers to the question, “How has your life changed?”

Groups or partners should randomly select for analysis ten cards from this collection. Have them write a script for a documentary illustrating how the feelings of Americans have changed or remained the same—and how the feelings of teens a year after 9/11 were similar or different to the feelings adult Americans had when answering the polls.
Follow-up activity:

Have students create a documentary film with their scripts. They can also tape classmate interviews to indicate how their peers now feel about 9/11. The purpose of this documentary is to determine how a random group of high school teens felt about 9/11; to compare this age group’s feelings to the adult national polls; to gauge how feelings about the event have changed over time and in the wake of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.

Students could also interview adults who were alive during the attack on Pearl Harbor and compare and analyze the similarities and differences in the situations and reactions.
Bibliography

General

Section I: War of Independence

Section II: Wars of Expansion

Section III: Civil War

Section IV: World War II

Section V: Cold War/Vietnam

Section VI: September 11 and Its Aftermath
Americans at War, produced by The History Channel
An introduction to the themes of the exhibition

War of Independence
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- Lydia Minturn Post, Long Island housewife, 1776
- James Collins, teenage soldier, no date
- Doonyontat, Wyandot chief, 1779
- Elijah Churchill, recipient of the first Purple Heart, 1783

Mexican War
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- José María Tornel y Mendívil, Mexican secretary of war, 1837
- George Ballentine, English volunteer for the United States, 1853
- Juan Bautista Vigil y Alarid, acting governor of New Mexico, 1846
- Ulysses S. Grant, American soldier, 1885

Civil War
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- Louis Myers, Third West Virginia Infantry, 1862
- William G. Christie, Minnesota soldier, 1863
- Eugenia Phillips, spy for the South in Washington D.C., 1861
- Spottwood Rice, African American Union soldier, 1864

World War I
World War I Overview, produced by The History Channel

World War II
World War II Cartoons, produced by The History Channel
World War II Overviews in the Newsreel format, produced by The History Channel
- From World War I to World War II
- The North Atlantic and North African Theater
- The European Theater
- The Pacific Theater
The USO in World War II, produced by The History Channel
First-Person Accounts, produced by Pyramid Studios:
- George Hynes, U.S. Army, a last letter home, 1942
- Robert Morris, U.S. Coast Guard, fighting in Italy, 1943
- Robert Sherrod, journalist, the beach at Tarawa, 1943
- Ann Darr, Women Airforce Service Pilots, 1997
- Daniel Inouye, Medal of Honor recipient, 2000

Vietnam
Excerpt from Huey Helicopter—Air Armada, The History Channel documentary, 2002
First-Person Accounts, produced by Arrowhead Film & Video:
- Hal Moore, commander of a Seventh Cavalry Regiment battalion, 2003
- Fred Castleberry, veteran of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Division, 2002
- Clarence Sasser, recipient of the Medal of Honor, 2004, (produced by Pyramid Studios)
Department of Education and Public Programs
National Museum of American History
Smithsonian Institution, MRC 603
Washington D.C. 20013-7012
http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory