

Assignment Description (For Teachers)

Title: How History Shaped Literature and How Literature Changed History: Serbs and the 1389 Battle of Kosovo

Author: Lisa Adeli, University of Arizona Center for Middle Eastern Studies

Purpose/Overview/Connection to the Curriculum: This lesson was designed for high school Social Studies, English, or (ideally) Social Studies/ English block classes. The lesson meets numerous Reading, Writing, World History, and Geography standards. In addition, it is also designed to examine the interrelationship of these disciplines: the ways in which history and geography affect literature and the ways that literature influences one's interpretation of history and geography.

Grade Level: High School.

Time: The lesson requires 2-3 class periods of in-class work (Days 1-3 to include a broader geography focus; Days 2-3 for a World History or Language Arts classroom with limited time). The lesson also requires 1-2 evenings of homework.

Targeted Skills - Based on Arizona State Standards:

High School Social Studies: Geography Strand:

- Concept 2: Places and Regions. PO 3 – Examine geographic issues in places and world regions. PO 4 - Analyze the differing political, religious, economic, demographic, and historical ways of viewing places and regions. PO 6 – Analyze how a region changes over time.
- Concept 4: Human Systems. PO 1 – Interpret population growth and demographics. PO 2 – Analyze push-pull factors that contribute to human migration. PO 3 – Analyze the effects of migration on places of origin and destination.
- Concept 6: Geographic Applications. PO 2 – Analyze how changing perceptions of places and environments affect where the choices of people and institutions. PO 3 – Analyze how geography influences historical events and movements.

High School Social Studies: World History Strand:

- Concept 1: Research Skills for History. PO 5 - Evaluate primary and secondary sources. PO7 -Compare present events with past events.
- Concept 3: The World in Transition. PO 3 - Compare the development of empires. (The Ottoman Empire is specifically cited.) PO 4 - Describe the interaction of European and Asian civilizations from the 12th to the 16th centuries.

- Concept 8: World At War. PO 1 - Examine the causes of World War I .(Subsequent points include specific references to Balkan nationalism.)

Grade 10 Reading:

- Concept 2: Historical and Cultural Aspects of Literature. PO 1: Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

Grade 10 Writing:

- most concepts for persuasive writing

Suggested Procedures:

Preparation:

Day 1:

1. Together:

A. Physical geography: Locate Kosovo on a map of the Balkans. Note the countries that border Kosovo. If you look up general information on the region, you will see that it is economically underdeveloped without a great deal of natural resources. You will also notice that it has been ruled by different empires/peoples.

B. Human geography: Read and discuss the short handout “Who Are We? Determining ‘Nationality’ or ‘Ethnicity’ in the Balkans.” Discuss the idea that in the Balkans, unlike in the U.S., one’s ‘nationality’ has nothing to do with geographic residence, but is something permanent and unchanging. This makes the issue of the population of Kosovo very, very complex and problematic.

2. Have students read the short “World Guide: Kosovo” either on line or through a photocopy. <http://www.intute.ac.uk/worldguide/html/1073.html>.

3. Either in groups or as a class, brainstorm ways in which the ‘national’ composition of a population might be affected by historical events. Make a chart – either in groups or as a class. List reasons why/how the population of Kosovo and the surrounding areas might change during the following historical periods and which group would be the majority during each time. (In red, I’ve highlighted some of the facts that they may come up with.)

-- Before Ottoman times (before the mid-1300s): Question: What happens to a population in a time of nomadic migrations in a place where the control of the Byzantine Empire was weakening?

Slavic groups (mostly Serbs) settled the area. A Serbian state was set up. Reasons: movement of nomadic groups and farmers in search of land.

-- During the Ottoman era (1389-1914): Question: What happens in a time when a new empire takes over, an empire in which the rulers come from a different religious (and

linguistic) background than their new subjects? What happens when that empire engages in a long series of wars with a neighboring empire?

Muslim Albanians and some Turks migrated into Kosovo while many Serbs moved northwards. Reasons: Serbs fled Turkish armies, later moved closer to Austrian (Christian-held) territory. After 1830, some Serbs moved into autonomous (later independent) Serbia. Albanians filled in the gaps, as well as some Turkish administrators. Although there were no forced conversions, there were incentives for voluntary conversions (higher status, no need to pay the non-Muslim tax), which would eventually cause people to be integrated into - through intermarriage? – into the Turkish or Albanian population.

-- During World War I and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1914-1941): Question: What effects does a change in borders have – when an area comes under the rule of a new state and new rulers from a different “national”/religious group?

Kosovo ruled by Serbs, so Serbs prospered at expense of Albanian population. Official or unofficial government policies to make Kosovo more Serbian?

-- World War II (1941-1945): Question: What are the effects on a population when one group is more oppressed by a foreign invader?

During World War II, Italy and then Germany oppressed the Serbs, so Albanians flourished.

-- Socialist (Tito’s) Yugoslavia (1945-1980). Question: What impact did the idea of “national equality” of groups within Yugoslavia have on Kosovo?

After the war, Albania became an “autonomous region” within Serbia so Albanian population of Kosovo increased. Higher birthrate. Many t.v. stations, schools, etc. in Albanian. Serbs not moving into Kosovo – some moving out.

-- Post-Tito (1980-present): Question: What happens in the modern, post-Soviet era when nationalism is no longer held in check by Communism?

Revolts of Albanians cause more Serbs to leave the area. 1999 – the Serbian massacres of Albanians and the huge number of refugees fleeing the area caused a drop in pop. But then (after 1999) U.S. actions gave Albanians control (eventually Kosovo got independence), so many Serbs left.

4. Look at the population figures documented in the ethnographic summary of Kosovo’s history. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Kosovo Discuss why it is sometimes hard (or undesirable) to count people in different groups. (Note, for example, the different ways in which the Ottomans and the Yugoslavs identified people. And notice how the new term ‘Kosovar’ had to be created over the last few years.)

5. Discussion:

- We have seen three different systems of identifying someone’s nationality: by religion, by language, by region. Are these different labels sometimes contradictory? How do different labels change how you look at people?

- Is it possible to have conflicting labels? Are there people who have trouble fitting into the classification system? (People of mixed parentage, or people whose religion differs from their language – eg. a Muslim Serb, who speaks the Serbian language but is a Muslim.)

- The regional designation 'Kosovars' is a new label. In what ways might it be problematic/fail to describe relationships among peoples? (Note that the label made it difficult for Americans to recognize the relationship between the Albanian-speaking Kosovars and their co-nationals in Albania and Macedonia. This led to an embarrassing incident in which CIA rifles, given to Kosovars, ended up in the hands of Albanian-minority rebels in Macedonia.)

Day 2:

Three Kosovo poems are provided for you as a PDF format, Document 5, "Heroes of Serbia." It is a very readable translation not only from Serbian into English but from poetry into prose. As a class, read aloud and discuss the first poem ("The Fall of Serbia") and one or both of the following poems. Questions for discussion and answers to those questions (including more information that you can share with students) are provided in Document 6, "Questions and Answers."

Homework:

Students should work in be divided into groups of two. (Whether students choose their partner or are assigned one is up to the teacher.) Half of the groups in each class should be assigned to read the background reading on the Sarajevo assassination of 1914; the other half should read the background reading on the 1999 Kosovo crisis. The background readings are also found in Documents 7 and 8. (Note: Both members of a pair should read the same background reading.)

Day 3:

- Students should work with their partners, preferably with access to a library and a computer lab.
- Each pair chooses a scenario from the list in Document 9. (Make sure that students choose one of the scenarios listed under the background section that they read the night before. Make a sign up sheet so that only one pair per class can sign up for any one scenario.
- Each pair is given a website list and a task sheet, Documents 10 and 11. (Note: Because of the lack of availability of materials in English, some of the websites are not "scholarly" sources. Nonetheless, they are acceptable for these particular topics.)
- The pair then researches the topic. They should divide up the work so that the group as a whole consults at least 3 different sources. (They may decide, for example, that both of them read a general overview and then consult a different specific source.)
- Together, the pair does the writing assignment on the task sheet according to instructions.
- They then either post it onto the class blog OR make 3 copies to hand in (one copy for the teacher to grade, the other two to go into a file for their classmates to read.

Homework (a few days later):

- Each student individually reads a report by one of his/her classmates. Note: The student should choose a report that is a different scenario but from the same background reading that he/she read.
- Each student then crafts a thoughtful, one-paragraph response, either posting it to the blog or handing it in according to the teacher's instructions.

Evaluation:

On a 100-point scale:

70 points for the researched report (written by a pair)

30 points for the quality of research about the historical event (Part 1 of the guide sheet)

30 points for the analysis of the event and its potential impact on a particular country (Part II of the guide sheet)

10 points for the clarity of writing, style, grammar, etc.

30 points for the response to other students' report (written individually)

Conclusion:

This lesson has shown how history influenced Serbian literature and how that literature, in turn, changed the course of history. But does this extreme example have any relevance to us?

I believe that it does. Even though the case of Kosovo is unusually vivid, it illustrates an important part of human culture. The fact is that even here, even now, our stories (oral, written, film) draw from our sense of history to shape who we are and what we believe about ourselves and about the rest of the world.