

NHD
NATIONAL
HISTORY DAY

4511 Knox Road
Suite 205
College Park, MD 20740
Voice (301) 314-9739
Fax (301) 314-9767
www.nhd.org

**“War is Hell. We Know it Now.”
American Soldiers in the
Meuse-Argonne Offensive**

Rebecca L. Byrd
New Center School
Sevierville, Tennessee

Grade Level:

6 – 8

Objectives:

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Compare and contrast three primary sources
- Evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of the documents for understanding the Meuse–Argonne Offensive from the perspective of American soldiers
- Synthesize information from the sources to create a newscast covering September 29 to October 2, 1918

Guiding Question:

How were the experiences of three soldiers during the Meuse–Argonne Offensive similar or different? What could account for the differences?

Connections to Common Core:

CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.6–8.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.9–10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA–Literacy.RH.11–12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

Connections to C3 Framework:

D2.His.6.6–8. Analyze how people’s perspectives influenced what information is available in the historical sources they created.

D3.2.6–8. Evaluate the credibility of a source by determining its relevance and intended use.

D2.His.11.9–12. Critique the usefulness of historical sources for a specific historical inquiry based on their maker, date, place of origin, intended audience, and purpose.

Documents Used:**Primary Sources:**

Field Service Diary of Edward Beach. September 29 to October 2, 1918 (pages 33–34)

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00216/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=33&submit.x=14&submit.y=6>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00216/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=34>

Eugene A. Curtin, Letter to Mother, September 29, 1918

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01379/pageturner?ID=pm0052001>

John Joseph Brennan, "My Own True Story of my Experience in the Army," September 29 to October 2, 1918

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=87&submit.x=5&submit.y=5>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=88>

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=89>

Secondary Sources:

Theodore Edward Beach Collection: Biographical Information

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00216>

John Joseph Brennan Collection: Biographical Information

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282>

Eugene A. Curtin Collection: Biographical Information

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/1379>

"American Forces under General Pershing Launched First Major Offensive in WWI
September 12, 1918"

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/jazz/jb_jazz_pershing_1.html

Lesson Description:

Overview: This lesson is designed to challenge students to not only compare and contrast sources, but also to draw inferences and make judgments about the sources. Students will also work together to create a newscast detailing the experiences of American soldiers in the Meuse–Argonne Offensive.

Time: 2 class periods with one additional class period for presentations

Materials:

- Graphic Organizer (choose option 1 or 2 based on the needs of your students)
- Task Sheet
- Vocabulary Sheet (optional)

Lesson Preparation:

- Print two or three copies of each primary source and the corresponding full biographical information page for each group.
- Choose one of the graphic organizers. Print one graphic organizer, task sheet and newscast rubric for each group.
- Print one Team Evaluation for each student.
- Make sure that students have access to secondary source information about World War I and the Meuse–Argonne Offensive in a textbook or other format. The America’s Library article listed as a secondary source is a good option.

Day 1 Procedure:

- Distribute materials to groups and monitor as students read and discuss sources.
- Students should complete graphic organizer by the end of class.

Day 2 Procedure:

- Lead discussion on the similarities and differences students found in the sources.
- Encourage students to draw inferences about the sources based on the biographical information page. For example, Eugene Curtin was a captain in the medical corps attached to a British unit while Ted Beach was a corporal in an artillery unit. Students should discuss how those differences may have impacted each man’s experience of war. Curtin’s experiences were recorded in the form of letters home, while Beach and Brennan kept a diary. Remind the students to consider the format of the sources and discuss the transcription process.
- Students should spend the remainder of the period assigning roles and creating the script for the newscast summary. The newscast assignment gives students the opportunity to work collaboratively in order to integrate information from diverse sources. The project along with its self–evaluation component is designed to prepare students for the type of team oriented environments found in many workplaces.

Presentation Day Procedure:

Each group will present their newscast and submit their completed graphic organizer and group evaluations.

Assessment Materials:

- World War I Newscast Team Evaluation Sheet
- Newscast Rubric

Methods for Extension:

- Have students record their newscasts and utilize software programs to incorporate newsreel footage or photographs into the newscast. Presentations can be uploaded to teacher or video sharing website.
- Have students use census records to research Curtin and Brennan's life after the war (Beach's memoir includes a brief biography at the end). Do the records indicate if their war experiences had any positive or negative long term effects on their lives?

Adaptations:

- For younger students, English language learners, or students with special needs, use graphic organizer 2 and include a vocabulary sheet for each student. Also consider omitting Beach's diary or reading it aloud and completing that part of the graphic organizer as a whole class activity before breaking into small groups.
- The lesson could also serve as the introduction to a unit on World War I. Students would read the sources and complete Graphic Organizer 1. The graphic organizer could then be used to create questions to guide student inquiry throughout the unit.

Bibliography:

Primary Sources

Beach, Theodore Edward. "Field Service Diary of Ted Beach; March 3 to November 28, 1918." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. October 26, 2011. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00216/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=33&submit.x=14&submit.y=6>.

Brennan, John Joseph. "My Own True Story of my Experience in the Army." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. October 26, 2011. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282/pageturner?ID=pm0001001&page=87&submit.x=5&submit.y=5>.

Curtin, Eugene. "Letter to Mother September 29, 1918." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. October 26, 2011. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/story/loc.natlib.afc2001001.01379/pageturner?ID=pm0052001>.

Secondary Sources

"American Forces under General Pershing Launched First Major Offensive in WWI September 12, 1918." Library of Congress. January 20, 2014. http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/jazz/jb_jazz_pershing_1.html.

"Eugene A. Curtin Collection: Biographical Information." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. February 22, 2013. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/1379>.

"John Joseph Brennan Collection: Biographical Information." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. February 22, 2013. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00282>.

"Theodore Edward Beach Collection: Biographical Information." Veterans History Project, Library of Congress. February 22, 2013. January 20, 2014. <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/diglib/vhp/bib/loc.natlib.afc2001001.00216>.

Meuse-Argonne Graphic Organizer (1)

Summarize the main points from each of the sources. Include relevant quotations and highlight areas of commonality.

John Joseph Brennan	Ted Beach	Eugene Curtin

What could account for the differences in the sources? (Refer to the biographical information)

Which source is most accurate? Least accurate? Why?

Meuse-Argonne Graphic Organizer (2)

Read and summarize each of the sources to complete the chart below. Some squares may be empty.

	Living Conditions	U.S. Strategy/Tactics	Enemy	Morale	Wounded
Ted Beach					
John Brennan					
Eugene Curtin					

What could account for the differences in the sources? (Refer to the biographical information)

Which source is most accurate? Least accurate? Why?

Task Sheet

Day 1– Read the three primary source documents and the corresponding bibliographical information. Complete the graphic organizer including the critical thinking questions at the bottom of the page. Designate a spokesperson for your group.

Day 2– Participate in discussion of sources. Plan your newscast and divide tasks among group members. See below for requirements

Newscast Requirements

Create a “newscast” about the Meuse–Argonne Offensive that is a minimum of two and maximum of five minutes long. The newscast should address the six journalistic questions of who, what, when, where, why and how. It should also incorporate information from the primary sources as well as secondary sources including, but not limited to your textbook and the article “American Forces under General Pershing Launched First Major Offensive in WWI, September 12, 1918” from America’s Library found at

http://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/jazz/jb_jazz_pershing_1.html Each group member must participate in the presentation. Newscasts will be presented live in class on the due date.

Ideas to consider:

- Interview one of the authors of the primary sources you read.
- Elaborate sets and costumes are not required, but make use of items in the classroom and from your homes to create a sense of time and place.
- Proceed with caution when using derogatory terminology in your presentations. If you are unsure of the appropriateness of your script, ask ahead of time.

World War I Vocabulary

Artillery– large guns that shoot over long distances or the crews that operate the guns.

Barrage– heavy and continuous firing of large guns often before troops advance.

Boche– derogatory term for German soldiers especially in WWI. The term comes from the French word *caboché* meaning cabbage. The term refers to the stereotypical image of Germans consuming sauerkraut, which is made from cabbage.

Concussion– can refer to the medical effects of a blow to the head or shock waves from firing a piece of artillery.

Cooties– slang term for body lice used first by British soldiers and then adopted by Americans.

Hardtack– a type of bread issued to soldiers as field rations. Hardtack is made from flour, water and sometimes salt. It is extremely hard and has little or no taste. Soldiers typically ate hardtack only when nothing else was available.

Hun– derogatory word for German soldiers. The term refers to Attila the Hun the famous military leader who menaced both the Eastern and Western Roman Empires in the mid 400's. The term brings to mind images of savage barbarians.

Infantry– soldiers who fight on foot

Jerry– derogatory word for German soldiers. The word is likely based on the pronunciation of German as “jer-man.” Another possibility is that is based on the shape of World War I German helmets. Some sources claim that the helmets looked like chamber pots called *jeroboam* after a biblical king who lost favor with God.

Morale– the confidence and enthusiasm of a group of people for completing the task at hand.

Shell-shock– term created in World War I to identify soldiers who suffered a variety of symptoms including amnesia, headache, tremors and sensitivity to noise. The symptoms were thought to be caused by prolonged exposure to bombardments and other front line conditions. Shell-shock is similar to the modern diagnosis of PTSD or post-traumatic stress disorder.

Strategy– the overall plan for achieving victory in warfare. The German strategy at the beginning of WWI was to quickly advance through Belgium then on to Paris. Once France surrendered, the Germans would be free to concentrate their efforts against Russia in the east. The strategy failed for a number of reasons including Belgium resistance and a quicker than expected Russian entry into the war.

Tactics– the actions carried out by groups of soldiers as part of the overall strategy to win a battle or war. In World War I, a common tactic was “going over the top.” This meant that soldiers would leave the relative safety of their trenches and run towards the enemy in a direct frontal assault.

World War I Newscast: Team Evaluation

Please assess your work on the project as well as your teammates work as honestly as possible. Due on presentation day.

Name: _____

	No	Maybe	Yes
I did at least my fair share of the work on this project.	1	3	5
I helped my teammates with their work.	1	3	5
I treated my teammates with respect as we worked.	1	3	5
I followed all directions from my teacher.	1	3	5

Teammate 1 Name: _____

	No	Maybe	Yes
He/she did at least my fair share of the work on this project.	1	3	5
He/she helped my teammates with their work.	1	3	5
He/she treated my teammates with respect as we worked.	1	3	5
He/she followed all directions from my teacher.	1	3	5

Teammate 2 Name: _____

	No	Maybe	Yes
He/she did at least my fair share of the work on this project.	1	3	5
He/she helped my teammates with their work.	1	3	5
He/she treated my teammates with respect as we worked.	1	3	5
He/she followed all directions from my teacher.	1	3	5

Teammate 3 Name: _____

	No	Maybe	Yes
He/she did at least my fair share of the work on this project.	1	3	5
He/she helped my teammates with their work.	1	3	5
He/she treated my teammates with respect as we worked.	1	3	5
He/she followed all directions from my teacher.	1	3	5

Teammate 4 Name: _____

	No	Maybe	Yes
He/she did at least my fair share of the work on this project.	1	3	5
He/she helped my teammates with their work.	1	3	5
He/she treated my teammates with respect as we worked.	1	3	5
He/she followed all directions from my teacher.	1	3	5

Presentation Rubric

Group Name

	4- Excellent	3-Good	2-Fair	1-Needs Improvement
Content	Presentation includes information from primary and secondary sources including quotes from primary sources. Presentation addresses all journalistic questions.	Presentation includes information from primary and secondary sources. Presentation addresses most of the journalistic questions.	Presentation includes information mostly from secondary sources with little primary source information. Presentation addresses some of the journalistic questions.	Presentation includes information only from secondary sources. Presentation addresses few of the journalistic questions.
Delivery/Style	All group members speak loudly and clearly. Presentation flows well and shows evidence of preparation. Presentation strongly evokes sense of time and place. Audience is engaged in the presentation.	Most group members speak loudly and clearly. Presentation flows and shows some evidence of preparation. Presentation evokes sense of time and place. Audience is engaged in the presentation.	Some group members speak loudly and clearly. Presentation is choppy and shows little evidence of preparation. Presentation somewhat evokes sense of time and place. Audience is somewhat engaged in the presentation.	Group members mumble or mispronounce key words. Presentation is choppy and disorganized and shows no evidence of preparation. Presentation does not evoke sense of time and place. Audience is not engaged.
Enthusiasm	All group members enthusiastically participate in the presentation.	Most group members enthusiastically participate in the presentation	Some group members enthusiastically participate in the presentation	Group members do not show enthusiasm in the presentation.
Requirements	All group members participate in significant ways. Meets time requirement.	Most group members participate in significant ways, but all do participate. Meets time requirements.	Some group members participate in significant ways, some do not participate. Slightly over or under time requirements.	Two or more group members do not participate. Significantly over or under time requirements.
Grade Scale	16-14 points= A	13-10 points= B	9-6 points= C	5 points or less =D
Additional comments				