



Building Empathy – Investigating the Experiences of a 21st Century Soldier

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Rationale

- One of the most significant portions of the Veterans Empathy Project is the building of empathy itself among citizens that know little of war's reality or its impact upon those who live the life of a soldier. This is reinforced within the mission statement created by the project's director Dr. John Pettegrew: "This is an oral history of combat veterans' experience in the post-September 11th wars. It is named the Veterans Empathy Project because it seeks to help bridge the huge gap of understanding in the United States today between civilians who never served in the military and the 100,000s of veterans who fought and killed and risked life and limb for their country." This lesson hopes to not only educate young people about the drama of war, but also build compassion for those who have endured the risk of looking one's life in service of the United States of America.

Objectives

- Following a short class discussion, students will be able to identify and describe critical periods within the life of an American soldier and hypothesize the impact these periods of time had on a soldier's life.
- Following an exploration of veteran interviews and other web content, students will be able to articulate similarities and differences between two or more soldier's enlistment experience, boot camp, deployment and tours of duty, or their experience when returning home.
- Following the development and execution of a class presentation, students will enhance their presentation skills by incorporating moving pictures as a mode for supporting their own ideas. (Optional Objective)

Suggested Procedures

Day One

Anticipatory Set

- The instructor should begin the lesson by discussing the meaning of two terms: empathy and perspective. This can be done in a variety of ways:
 - The instructor could provide a definition of each term and ask students to evaluate the definition's effectiveness.
 - The instructor could ask students to develop their own definition and work cooperatively to evaluate that definition.
 - The instructor could have student's research these terms cooperatively using a combination of print and electronic sources.
- Following the conclusion of whichever discussion path the instructor chooses, the instructor should emphasize the connection between these terms: when one can see the world through another's perspective, it is infinitely easy to find Empathy for their situation and, in the soldier's case, the tremendous risk they have chosen to take on. The instructor should then transition into the Veterans Empathy Project itself, which can serve as the means to appreciate another's perspective and, in turn, empathize with the life they lead.



Development

- The instructor should use a computer connected to an LCD projector to display the [Veterans Empathy Project](#) website. The instructor might move to the [About the Project](#) section of the webpage to say more about the project's mission, or jump directly into the [In their Own Words](#) section, which is where students will spend the majority of their time. First, the instructor should model how students can play the videos and interact with tags within this part of the website, hopefully helping students choose which interviews they would like to look at.
- Secondly, the instructor should identify the tabs at the bottom of the [In their Own Words](#) interview pages. The instructor needs to emphasize that the four tabs (enlistment, training, deployment, and coming home) all point to a specific part of the interview, but, more importantly, illustrate a critical part of that soldier's life in connection to the armed forces. The instructor might model this step with one particular interview, commenting briefly on each tab of the interview section.
- Following this short demonstration, the instructor should ask students to choose an area of the interview to focus on (enlistment, training, deployment, or coming home) and watch two or three different interviews to get a feel for each soldier's experience during this section of their life. The instructor should suggest that students take note of what the soldier's reported about that time in their life and anything that seems interesting to the student at the time.
- The instructor should give the students the great majority of the class period to focus on this task. If time becomes an issue for some students the instructor should suggest the summary below the video to complete their notes, but should also emphasize the importance of listening to oral history recordings first hand when possible.

Closure

- Towards the end of the time allotted for the lesson, students should be given time to reflect on the interviews overall. What general themes were noticeable within the section the students worked on? What similarities or differences can the students notice when comparing the soldier's testimonies?
- After students have had time to reflect, students should share out their findings with the class or in small groups to close class; an activity the instructor could use for informal evaluation purposes.

A second and third day might be added to the lesson if the instructor would like to formally evaluate the lesson via student presentations. In this way a second day might be used for students to create the presentation based on their notes and a third used for class presentations, either within small groups or as an entire class. The suggested resource for such presentations is Microsoft PowerPoint – asking students to use Veterans Empathy Project interviews as embedded evidence to support their conclusions. A short video is included on the resources homepage that provides an overview of how videos can be embedded into PowerPoint.

Possible Modes of Evaluation

- This lesson can be evaluated informally or formally at the teachers discretion:
 - Informal Evaluation – The instructor might gather a sense of what conclusions students arrived to following the ideas they share during the initial closure discussion.
 - Formal Evaluation – If the instructor decides that a class presentation dealing with conclusions students have gathered is appropriate, this assignment might be formally evaluated as a check for understanding and to provide feedback to students.



Differentiation

- While the lesson does differentiate naturally by providing students with choice of focus and content, lesson activities might be further differentiated for lower level and advanced level learners.
 - Lower level learners may need simple definitions for the interview segments the lesson focuses on ahead of time to help with comprehension purposes. The instructor might use the definitions below:
 - Enlistment – The period of time in which a soldier decides whether or not to join the armed forces, including the steps taken towards formally becoming a soldier.
 - Training – Several weeks of time during which a soldier is taught what they need to know to be a soldier. This is sometime referred to as “Basic Training” or “Boot Camp.”
 - Deployment – This section of a soldier’s life is when they are overseas in the combat arena, whether on the front lines or in a supporting role. Sometimes soldiers will be “deployed” more than once, to which they will come home for some time and then return to battle. These periods of time are sometimes called “tours,” as in “first tour” or “second tour,” which tells us how many times the soldier has been sent overseas into enemy territory.
 - Coming Home – While easy to see as self-explanatory, coming home is often one of the most difficult times for soldiers, who have to deal with the difficult things they have experienced and get used to living at home again.
 - Advanced learners might be directed to other sections of the Veterans Empathy Project to complement their investigation of a particular phase of the soldier’s life, such as the interview with film maker [Eugene Jarecki](#) or the Town Hall meeting entitled [“Understanding the Experiences of U.S. Combat Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.”](#) In addition, students might be pointed to the web resources section of the Veterans Empathy Project for further exploration as well.

Potential Connection to the Danielson Group’s *Framework for Teaching Evaluation Instrument*

The *Veterans Empathy Project* hopes to connect with teachers across the country, to which many areas throughout the United States have embraced the Charlotte Danielson *Framework for Teaching* initiative for effective instruction. This lesson connects to many of those facets instruction, several of which are noted below.

- Domain 1a – Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy
- Domain 1d – Demonstrating Knowledge of Resources
- Domain 2b – Establishing a Culture for Learning
- Domain 3b – Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques