

Teaching about Terrorism Using the Internet

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Just about two weeks prior to the terrorist bombing of the Boston Marathon, I had begun doing research on information, strategies, and lesson plans available to teachers for teaching about terrorism. The idea had come to me while reading a survey about subject matters that classroom science teachers avoided because they were considered too controversial. The subject that ranked highest was evolution. Parents and other citizens are so divided about the concept of divine creation, Darwinian evolution, and positions in-between, that local and state school curriculum meetings become heated, policies are changed, teachers' jobs are threatened, and textbook publishers are forced to ignore or downplay the topic. I thought about the issues that social studies teachers downplay or avoid because they don't want to stir up controversy in the classroom, and right away, I thought of terrorism.

I know how terrorist attacks cause anger and hatred among many—probably most—U.S. citizens. Often, Muslim places of worship are vandalized as a result. Muslim men and women wearing traditional clothing are verbally and sometimes physically attacked. There are calls for retribution, even if it means making war-like decisions such as revenge attacks or troop movements overseas.

I think about the world history course I taught for seven years to high school sophomores. The course was divided into three sections: (1) a semester-long overview of world history; (2) a nine-week section titled "Man's Search for Religion (that would be "The Human Search..." today.); and (3) "Man's Search for Government." Each year, my students selected the "search for religion unit" as their favorite. We had speakers on the major religions of the world, various denominations within Christianity, and the role of religion throughout world history. Near the end of the unit, we took all world history

students to visit the Baha'i Temple in nearby Wilmette, Illinois, where the primary principle is "...unity—the oneness of God, the oneness of religion, and the oneness of the human race."

But back then, I didn't have to teach about 9-11, the Boston Marathon bombing, or the public murder of a British soldier with daggers and meat cleavers. It would be difficult to try and discuss *Jihad* in any kind of a rational way in a classroom today. But, I wanted to try and find resources, strategies, and even lesson plans that could help students understand that all terrorism is not based on religious beliefs, that all Muslims are not terrorists or terrorist supporters, and that terrorism has occurred throughout human history and in many cultures.

Then, I found a great book that helped me understand that teaching about terrorism is essential and that it can be done effectively. The book, directed to teachers, curriculum supervisors, and teacher educators, is called *Education, Extremism, and Terrorism:*

What Should Be Taught in Citizenship and Why, and is by Diane Gereluk, a faculty member at the University of Calgary in Alberta, Canada. I had my local library purchase the book, but a superb review by Bryan Warnick of Ohio State University is published by *Education Review*, www.edrev.info/reviews/rev1215.pdf. (I subscribe to a weekly e-mail that lists the books reviewed that week. Go to www.edrev.info/index.html, click on "announcements" and follow the instructions to sign up.)

Gereluk contends that no other topic has affected contemporary political discourse as much as the topic of terrorism. She notes that "many of the curriculum guides and curriculum materials have little to do with understanding terrorism, and [have] more to do with soothing student anxiety, attempting to increase public safety, enlisting students in identifying dangerous people and situations, and promoting patriotism." She says that schools have an "obligation to discuss terrorism." She also discusses whether or not a teacher who believes that U.S. or United Kingdom policies may have contributed to the growth of terrorism is able to mention this in the classroom.

In his review, Warnick presents Gereluk's many astute observations and expands on his own views of terrorism. Even if you don't teach courses that include terrorism, please do read Bryan Warnick's review of Diane Gereluk's book. The review should be required reading for all teachers and teachers-

in-training, and the book should be in every School of Education library.

Below are websites that I believe will help classroom teachers deal with terrorism-related issues and terrorist events. Most can be useful to teachers in all grade levels. Some include lesson plans that can be adapted to different courses.



The Guardian Newspaper

www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2013/apr/21/boston-marathon-explosions-news-resources

The U.K.'s Guardian has developed a good set of materials and even lesson plans. This link to their "Teacher Resources" section focuses on the Boston bombings, but has some other strategies and materials for other terrorism-related topics.

U.S. Department of State

<http://history.state.gov/education/modules/terrorism-intro>

This link takes you to the Department of State's Education Resources section and their Curriculum Modules, which include video, print materials, and other resources. This packet is titled "Terrorism: A War without Borders." The full curriculum guide is available as a PDF document. While you're there, check out the module titled "Documents on Diplomacy: Primary Sources and Documents and Lessons from the World of Foreign Affairs. U.S. history and civics/citizenship teachers will refer to it and use its resources frequently.



TeachersFirst.com

<http://legacy.teachersfirst.com/lessons/terrorism.cfm>

TeachersFirst is a great resource for teachers. It's free and has a wide variety of materials for all grade levels and subject areas. This page focuses on both terrorism and tolerance, has several good lesson plans, and a well-selected set of links to other websites on cross-cultural understanding, causes of terrorism, and activities for cultivating tolerance.



Purple Wagon

www.extension.purdue.edu/purplewagon/

Purple Wagon is a comprehensive site developed by Judith Myers-Wall, a Purdue University professor. The site is for "parents and teachers and their explorations and discussions of war, terrorism, and peacemaking." Click on "Educators/Teachers," and find a large number of classroom activities and resources, including "144 Ways to Say Peace," a list of children's books on peace, and curriculum guides from a variety of organizations and institutions. It's probably focused more on elementary students, but many of the activities can easily be adapted.



U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany

<http://germany.usembassy.gov/>

I saved the best site for last. This site has the most comprehensive list of organizations and other sources for teaching about terrorism using a balanced approach. It includes Internet links, lesson plans, background resources, and an excellent selection of articles and commentary on the topic. You won't get bored here.

I am glad that I decided to take on a topic that I had avoided. The resources and links that I've recommended provide a way to help teachers and supervisors teach about terrorists and terrorism with a balanced and more accurate approach. 🌍

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