



ABRAHAM LINCOLN BRIGADE ARCHIVES

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Ideology and Action: A Unit for Senior “Crew” Class, a course devoted to the study of goals, moral choices and character development

Unit Rationale

The Spanish Civil War presents a richness and complexity of issues that could not be adequately addressed in my Spanish III classes, which, for one, only meet for two hours a week. As the themes and issues of the War became unveiled in the Institute, I found that I could best engage teens around the philosophical questions they pose. In our school, Crew class is a place where deep discussion and reflection about life and goals take place. BCS subscribes to the principles of Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound which emphasize moral choices, character development and the “primacy of self-discovery.”

I have created a unit plan for my Senior Crew, inspired by the lessons of the ALBA Institute, designed to engage students by balancing the larger philosophical questions of belief, commitment and what it means to take a stand with the more practical issues of becoming an adult and making independent choices.

Big Ideas

- How do we define self and how do individuals create their identities?
- What is the difference between belief and ideology? How do they influence individual and collective action?
- At what point do young adults break-away from family to become their own persons?

Essential Questions/Enduring Understandings

- What does it mean to put one’s life on the line? -- Pure altruism v. Conviction
- Is there anything you are willing to die for?
- What variables guide major life decisions, like deciding to join a war?

Content Knowledge

Introduction to the predominant theme of the Spanish Civil War: democracy v. dictatorship
Introduction to the predominant theme (s) of the international volunteers: fighting for freedom (or youthful adventurism).

Leaders and ordinary people who sacrificed:

- Martin Luther King, “If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.” ([Martin Luther King, Jr., speech, Detroit, Michigan, June 23, 1963.](#))

- Spanish Civil War background essay, letters and profiles of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers and of supporters of the Spanish Republic’s fight against fascism. Found in [Political Participation Lesson Packet](#) on ALBA web site.

Skills

- Students will learn to distinguish between beliefs and ideology.
- Students will learn to read a primary source
- Students will reflect on their own beliefs and ideology.

Assessment

- Students will produce a Belief Statement to bring their beliefs and ideology into focus.
- Students will write an essay, “What is means to become an adult.”

Activities

Day 1: Introduction to Spanish Civil War and American volunteers.

Day 2: Lecture: Martin Luther King as someone who died for his beliefs. Discussion: beliefs v. ideology. What defines an individual?

Day 3: Discussion -- Is there anything you are willing to die for: family, friends, beliefs, justice, religion or country?

Day 4: Discussion -- Brigade volunteers and their decisions. What guides your decisions?

Resources

Primary resources:

- Letter from Canute Frankson to "Friend," July 6, 1937. Canute discusses race and its part in the international struggle he is fighting in.
- James Lardner writes to his mother about his decision to fight against fascism, May 3 1938. In this letter he lists his reasons for joining the International Brigades.
- Spanish Civil War background essay, letters and profiles of Abraham Lincoln Brigade volunteers and of supporters of the Spanish Republic’s fight against fascism. Found in [Political Participation Lesson Packet](#) on ALBA web site.
- Martin Luther King, “If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for, he isn't fit to live.” ([Martin Luther King, Jr., speech, Detroit, Michigan, June 23, 1963.](#))

Secondary resources: Article:

[“The Inquiry into the Education of Don Henry and His Subsequent Death in the Spanish Civil War.”](#) Social Education, v62 n3 p135-41 Mar 1998. [Schamel, Charles E.](#); [Schamel, Wynell B.](#)

Peter N. Carroll. [The Odyssey of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade.](#) (Stanford University Press, 1994). Chapter 8 – “The Ideology of Commitment.” For [purchase](#) on ALBA web site.