

Lesson Plans: Create an “Institute of Student Cultures” Exhibit in Your Classroom.

Goal: Students will create individual “exhibits” about their families which, mounted together in the classroom, will offer a view of the range of the classroom community’s heritage.

Teacher Preparation:

1. Ask your librarian to reserve books related to the history and culture of different countries and continents as itemized in Day 2.
2. Duplicate the student page and rubric page for this activity, one per student.
3. Obtain a package of 12” x 18” construction paper in different colors, enough for students to have one sheet each for mounting their family exhibit. (The paper size will force students to make choices.)

Day 1 (twenty minutes): Introduction.

Focus activity:

Read aloud “The Hanicaks: One Czech Family,” which tells about the first generation of a family who moved from one of the regions (Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia) which now compose the Czech Republic.

Pass out the student page and the rubric.

Tell students they are to interview their parents and/or grandparents to learn about their family’s first Texans, record information, and gather photographs or make sketches of artifacts or structures.

Preview the plan for “The Institute of Student Cultures” and each student’s family exhibit, including the rubric. Have students sign and date the rubric and return to you.

Day 2 (one to two class periods): Class day for access to resources.

Meet in the library if possible so that students will have best access to atlases, encyclopedias, national history and culture texts, Internet sites, and other resources. Help students find information on their family’s homeland, language, history (Who was king at the time their family left? for example), including maps and some historical and cultural information. Some students will be working with very precise family data; others will have somewhat vague information. Help each take what they have and learn more.

Day 3 (Social Studies or Language Arts Assignment): Family Story Exhibit Label, first draft.

Students should have their interview notes and the research notes to use in writing their first Texan’s story. Use his/her name or “The ___ Family” as their titles.

Most students will not be able to use all of the information they have. *Making decisions about what information should be kept and what eliminated is part of the assignment.*

Mark and return student papers, or let the students read and discuss them in groups, asking questions to help one another determine which information is important.

Day 4 (or homework): Have the students prepare final draft of story and mount with choice of photographs or drawings. Students may select only what will fit on the 12” x 18” sheet of paper.

Day 5: Collect student exhibits; mount them together on a bulletin board or hallway wall. Have a team of early birds prepare a title strip for your exhibit: “The Institute of Student Cultures.”

Hanicak Family

The Hanicak (pronounced Hon-itzak) family—Jan, Katerina, and two of their children, Jan Jr. and Annie—came to Texas in 1906. Jan, a cottager who farmed small plots of land, had to serve in the Austrian Army like most young adult males in what became Czechoslovakia. Austria then controlled where the Hanicak family lived. In the army, a cavalry horse injured Jan, and he killed the horse in self-defense. Since there were more men than horses in the army, he was sent to prison as punishment for killing the horse.

Jan's brother, Peter, and his family had already immigrated to a Czech community in Bessmay, Texas, located thirty-seven miles north of Beaumont in south-central Jasper County. Peter worked in a sawmill in nearby Deweyville. When Peter wrote about how good life was in Texas, Jan and Katerina began to save their money to immigrate to Deweyville.

They left from Novy Grozenkov in August 1906, taking only two small trunks of clothes with them. Jan Jr., only 18 months old, was sick during most of the boat trip. In fact, almost everyone on the ship got seasick except Annie, their daughter. She took meals to some people too sick to get their own food. The trip took twenty-six days, and they arrived in Galveston, Texas, on Annie's eighth birthday.

The family moved to Bessmay to join their relatives, and Jan got a job at the nearby sawmill in Kirby. The Hanicaks liked their new home, but life was difficult. Although fluent and literate in Czech, German, and Russian, they could not speak English. Some children in school made fun of Annie and took her things. Once the teacher asked Annie if she took a pencil from another student, which she had not, but the only English word she knew at the time was "yes," so that was how she answered. The teacher punished her.

After the Hanicaks had been in Texas for several years, Jan Sr. hurt his leg in an accident at the sawmill. The men who worked with him put a tourniquet on his leg and took him to the closest hospital about thirty miles away. The doctor amputated his leg because the tourniquet had been left on too long. After that money was scarce, so Katerina took in roomers and cooked meals for them, converting the Hanicak home into a boardinghouse. Annie and Jan Jr. helped by running errands for the neighbors and doing odd jobs. At thirteen Jan Jr. quit school and went to work full-time at the sawmill. The family continued to work very hard to save enough money to buy a home. Finally, a few years after Jan Sr. died, Katerina was able to get her own home.

Jan Jr., who took the English name of John, proudly gained American citizenship. In 1935 he married Scottish-Swiss Texan Margaret McGhee of Brownwood, Texas.

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