

Unit 2, Lesson 1: Ways of Thinking About People and Places in the Past

Lesson Overview

In this lesson students are introduced to ways of thinking about people and places in the past that are often misinformed and that had negative consequences - with a focus on Africa. This lesson aims to address and correct the misinformation.

Note – at one point in Resource 3 of the lesson there is a generic statement “some people enslaved other people.” It is reasonable to wonder why this lacks specificity in light of the Black experience. The specificity will come in later lessons (Unit 4), after sufficient groundwork is laid in a manner that buffers against assumptions that only certain people throughout history were enslaved as this may have the unintended effect of influencing some students' self-identity in negative ways.

Delaware Standard(s)

- **History Standard 1a, 4-5 [Chronology]:** Students will study historical events and persons within a given time frame in order to create a chronology and identify related cause-effect factors.
- **History Standard 2a, 4-5 [Analysis]:** Students will draw historical conclusions and construct historical accounts from primary and secondary source materials

Big Ideas

- deficit, deficit past, stereotypes, misconceptions, inferior, advanced

Essential Questions

- What are some misconceptions about other places and the people who live in them? What effects have these deficit ways of thinking had?

Enduring Understandings

Students will understand that, before 1492, there was great diversity on different continents that included impressive levels of development. However, misconceptions, stereotypes and deficit ways of thinking have caused people to view “others” and “other” places as inferior, views that have resulted in great harm to others.

Vocabulary

The term “deficit past” is used in this lesson and is defined midway through the lesson in Resource 3. The term is used to describe a way of thinking that suggests people in the past were dumb or not as smart as we are today, in part because they held different beliefs or did not have the same technology that we have today. No need to introduce students to this yet but it is helpful for teachers to know before students encounter the term.

Resources

- [Lesson 1 Google slides](#)
- [Resource 1: A Place 600 Years Ago](#)

- [Resource 2: How to Survive Without Them](#)
- [Resource 3: Ways of Thinking About Other Times and Other People](#)
- [Resource 4: Images of Four Cities on Four Continents Before 1491](#)
- [Resource 5: Map of Ancient and Medieval African States and Empires](#)
- [Resource 6: West Africa Before Columbus \(1492\)](#)
- [Resource 7: Misconceptions Game Playing Cards](#)
- [Resource 8: Misconceptions Game Statements - Africa](#)

Procedures

1. **Introduce the Lesson:** Tell students that, in this lesson they are going to explore ways that people think about other people and places, with a focus on the past.
2. **Warm-Up - Conceptions of Places Long Ago:** The warm-up aims to make students' conceptions of the past visible. Students will consider what comes to their minds when they think of a place that existed approximately 600 years ago, or just before Columbus arrived in the "New World?"
 - a. Distribute copies of [Resource 1: A Place 600 Years Ago](#). Read the instructions as students follow along. Then have them complete the two tasks on the handout.
 - b. Invite a few volunteers to share their work. Collect, save, and analyze the papers to uncover common thoughts and misconceptions that students might have.
3. **Thought Experiment:** Tell students that you now want them to think about life long ago but in a different way. This time you want them to think about two things:
 - a. What are some things that people today would have a difficult time living without?
 - b. What might be a way to substitute for those things if people did not have them?

Do not reveal this yet but a goal of this activity is to have students struggle to be able to think of things that people in the past did in the absence of modern conveniences. Given that they were able to do this, might it suggest that people in the past were actually pretty smart - a way of thinking that considers notions of a *deficit past*.

Distribute copies of [Resource 2: How to Survive Without Them](#). Read the directions aloud as students follow along. Have them work with a partner or in small groups to discuss responses.

Invite volunteers to share their work and commend them on their creative thinking.

Highlight the fact that people who lived long ago did without any of these items and, because they were smart, they figured out ways to do what the things did without them. It is unfair to suggest that people in the past were not smart simply because they did not have the things or knowledge that we have today, anymore than if people 100 years from now look back on things we do or do not have and suggest that we were dumb. Each generation is able to take advantage of what previous generations did.

4. **Reading:** Tell students that they are now going to read about some of the ways that people think about people and places from long ago. Distribute copies of - [Resource 3: Ways of Thinking About Other Times and Other People](#). Read aloud as students follow along. Note the "Pause Points" at which you should pause and allow students to share and discuss their responses to the prompts.

5. **Image Analysis:** See [Resource 4: Images of Four Cities on Four Continents Before 1491](#) (noting there are 4 different images on 4 different pages). Project copies of the images of pre-Columbian cities for all to see.
- Tell students that they are about to look at images of cities that existed long before 1491 - over 600 years ago. Think about the following as you analyze the images.
 - What are your first impressions as you look at the images of the cities?
 - In what ways are the cities similar?
 - Guess which continent the cities were on. Why did you guess this continent?
 - Do the images match what you had in mind when you did the warm-up? If not, how do the images differ from what you had in mind?
 - Invite students to analyze the images, discuss the questions with those around them, and share responses.

For the Teacher: The images on Resource 5 are of the following

Image 1: America/Tenochtitlan (14th Century)

Image 2: Asia/Forbidden City, Beijing (15th Century)

Image 3: Europe/London (12th Century)

Image 4: Africa/Egypt - Pi-Ramses City (13th Century)

The images show one major city on each of the four continents of Africa, America, Asia, and Europe.

- Debrief:** the purpose of this activity is to help students understand that while there was tremendous diversity on the four continents featured, that diversity included well developed civilizations on all four of the continents about which they will be reading in future units. This aims to counter judgments about levels of advancement and notions of inferiority that fueled justifications for enslavement. More about this in the next reading.
6. **Reading - Africa Before Columbus (1491).** Black American history has often been taught beginning with enslavement and this start pointing has been justifiably criticized. This reading launches the journey into Black history with a general overview of what Africa was like before the Europeans arrived and crafted a new chapter in the history of enslavement. It is important to establish the fact that Africa, like Europe, was an incredibly diverse place with riches and levels of development that matched those found on other continents. This approach confronts misconceptions and deficit ways of thinking that existed in the past (and to some extent in the present) and were used to justify enslavement.
- Distribute copies of [Resource 6: West Africa Before Columbus \(1492\)](#) while projecting the map of African empires on [Resource 5: Map of Ancient and Medieval African States and Empires](#). Be prepared to point to locations on the map referenced in the reading. Tell students that they are now going to learn a bit about what parts of Africa were like at the time in history (600 years ago) when people from Africa were first brought to the part of the world where we now live.
 - Debrief the activity:** ask students, what was Western Africa like before people from Europe started exploring the continent?

- i. Highlight the fact that, as the map suggests, there were impressive levels of development throughout Africa (point to the various “African States” on the map). The information about Western Africa serves as an example.
7. **Addressing Persistent Misconceptions:** Write or Project the word “Africa” for all to see.
 - a. Ask students to jot down what comes to mind when they think about Africa today.
 - b. Gather any examples of misconceptions that might exist and save them for future versions of the following game.
8. **MAKE THE MIS DIS (Misconception DISappear)?** The Misconception Game: Tell students that there continue to be misconceptions about Africa that persist to this day. They may have identified some of them in the previous procedure. In the next activity, they will play a game to see if they can identify some of the common misconceptions about Africa and make them disappear. The game is called “**Make the Mis Dis.**”
 - a. See [Resource 8: Misconceptions Game Statements - Africa](#). Tell students that you are going to present one statement about Africa at a time – just the statements, not any images. Partner 1 is assigned the first statement and rest of the odd numbered statements. If the statement presented is a misconception, students are to make the misconception statement “dis”appear by turning the “Statement Card” face down so that the blank side of the card is showing (the statement disappeared). If the students do not think it is a misconception, they are to keep the Statement card face up. Partner 2 can try to talk Partner 1 out of his or her conclusion.
 - b. Do not reveal which are misconceptions until you have gone through all of the statements. This way students don’t know who is winning or losing until the big reveal at the end.
 - c. Partner 2 goes next and is presented with the Statement 2 and repeats the instructions described for Partner 1 above with the exception that he or she is assigned the even numbered statements.
 - d. Repeat the instructions above with Statements 3-10.
 - e. The student who accurately identifies the most misconceptions or factual statements is declared the winner (or both do if there is a tie).
9. **Video Reinforcement:** The YouTube video “Debunking The Most Shocking Myths and Misconceptions about Africa” that you can access [here](#) offers an African perspective on common misconceptions that people have about Africa. Most of the ones discussed on the video extend information about misconceptions presented in the “Make the Mis Dis” game (see Procedure 8 above). Others will be new to students.

Debrief

Revisit the essential questions for the lesson and offer students the enduring understanding.

1. What are some misconceptions about other places and the people who live in them?
2. What effects have these deficit ways of thinking had?

Emphasize the Following

- To be different is not to be inferior
- To be different does not justify treating others in unequal, unfair, or hurtful ways
- It may be good for our first instinct to involve appreciating differences (although do not merit our support), especially because some of the differences might suggest ways that we can become better

- Misconceptions and stereotypes can cause great harm to other people
- People are often feel insulted when those from other places say things that are not true about their continents, countries, cultures, and people, and that have the effect of making people think that they are inferior or backward