

Avoiding Worksheets in Social Studies

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Rationale

1. "Variety is the spice of life."
2. Most of these activities force students to **personalize** information.
3. These activities appeal to different types of learners (Multiple Intelligences!)
4. If you have the choice between having fun and not having fun, have fun.

Tips

1. Before using Drama activities in class, use a **warm up** activity to get the kids focused on what they are doing. Examples include "Applause", I Love Life, or even saying a short tongue twister five times (ie. New York, New York; Knapsack Straps; Toy Boat.)
2. Do not focus on props and costumes. They are fun, but kids tend to use them in silly ways that do not help them understand anything. 1-2 props per presentation is more than adequate.
3. Have clear **control signals**. If you plan to use "unstructured" Drama activities extensively in class, it is very worthwhile to spend some time training the kids to respond to control signals. I use **Stop** (stop, look, and listen), **Freeze** (stop your actions completely, as if you are frozen), and a **code word** (a "green light" to start an activity.)

RAFT Writing Assignments

Students can choose a variety of **Roles**, **Audiences**, **Formats**, and **Tenses**. This allows students to learn facts and to be creative with their learning. Not only is this an excellent enrichment activity, it can be used to literally "avoid worksheets." Instead of answering questions and filling in the blanks while reading a chapter, you can create a RAFT assignment to help them learn the facts. Roles could include historical figure, Prime Minister, factory worker, Rasputin, etc. Formats are limitless - journals, news or magazine articles, letters, interviews, and diaries all work very well.

Visual Definitions

Visual definitions fit in nicely for students to understand concepts in a different way:

Diagrams - Webbing, mind-mapping, time lines, and creating charts all help students to understand concepts.

Visual Definition - Instead of writing out vocabulary lists, have kids draw or find pictures to represent the vocabulary terms.

Stick People Cartoons - This is similar to above, but it appeals to the artistically impaired. It really helps to have the stick people **saying** things that explain the concept that students are demonstrating.

Fish Bowl

Students sit in a circle with five seats in the middle of the circle. Four chairs are arranged in the middle. A fifth chair - the "waiting chair" - is placed between the outer and inner circle. The teacher asks for four people who "like to talk." These four sit in the inner