

SUGGESTIONS FOR LESSON PLANS FOR FUR WAR

There were many remarkable stories and important events during the Fur War and classroom activities and assignments can help bring them to life. For younger students an activity like making a kelp frond might be the right level. For high school juniors and senior or college students much more challenging assignments can be developed.

I put together some class notes and adapted them to the topics of the fur war and the people involved in the fur trade. I also did a few quick searches to see what other teachers have done.

Bob Dabritz, one of our family friends, had his middle school students carve a dugout canoe and then paddled on the Columbia River. Few have his enthusiasm, courage, patience and fortitude — but his students will never forget their successful project.

I would encourage teachers to emphasize the remarkable skills and communities of the First Nations and the terrible hardships they endured from disease, cheating and violent traders, and ill-informed and prejudiced politicians. Broken treaties were the norm. Much could also be done with history, politics, culture, art, and folk tales.

The ecological issues involved in the Fur War have received scant attention — one of the reasons I wrote these books. The removal of the beaver and otter forever changed the ecosystems of the Fur Coast. The explosion of urchins and the loss of kelp have had effects that still ripple through the region. These impoverished humans as well as upsetting food webs and nutrient and energy movement. Nancy Caruso, a remarkable biologist in Southern California put young students to work raising kelp for replanting along the California coast. The Orange County Ocean Restoration Project has now taught 5,000 students how to grow giant kelp in their classrooms. It was then planted in the ocean by 250 trained volunteers. There are now giant kelp forests in areas that had been barren for more than 25 years. <https://encenter.org/nancy-caruso-bio/>

One of the most remarkable aspects of the Fur War is the question of **what might have been** with only a few changes in policy or action. What if Baranov had been killed by the Tlingit during his assault on their fort? No one of his capability could have been found and the Russians might well have abandoned Alaska... The Tlingit might have remained a powerful nation we could now visit!

What if Joseph Burling O'Cain had been granted citizenship by the California governor. Here was a man of many talents, energy and innovation. He helped the Russians get rich instead by partnering with them in vacuuming up the sea otters from the Fur Coast as far south as Cedros Island off Baja California. Fur riches could have helped Spain improve and defend the coast. This might have forestalled American settlement and prevented the Mexican Revolution from succeeding....

What if the Spanish had followed up with a settlement by their fort at Neah Bay (Washington) or on Vancouver Island at Nootka Sound. Or what if they had been able to extend the chain of missions north to the Columbia.

My two books will help provide background information and I hope these fragments of lesson plans will help you find topics that will engage you and your students.

A bonus: most of these topics have been so little discussed that it will be harder for students to plagiarize!!

Best wishes,

David



HUMANITIES 1020: THE GOOD LIFE
THE LESSONS OF LEWIS AND CLARK