

Subject: Social Studies: The First People

Grade Level: 8

Objectives:

- ❑ To use storytelling to capture the students’ interest in the topic of Easter Island and the statues called, Moai.
- ❑ To educate the students’ regarding the mystery behind the Moai on Easter Island.

Background:

Easter Island is an island that is situated between the coast of Chile and the island of Tahiti. The early inhabitants were a stone aged society that are known for their giant statues, called Moai, carved out of volcanic rock. There is a fair bit of mystery shrouding this island which lends itself well to storytelling.

Materials:

- ❑ Overhead projector and Moai statue made of green glass

Lesson Plan:

Activating Phase

Place translucent moai statue on top of overhead projector. Switch on projector and switch off the classroom lights. The light from the projector will shine up through the statue and cause it to glow with a greenish glow. This will grab the students’ interest right away and cause them to be curious about what will happen next.

Acquiring Phase

Tell the students the following historically based story...

It was almost 300 years ago now, on an Easter Sunday morning in 1722, when the Dutch explorer Jacob Roggeveen, who was searching for what all explorers search for, undiscovered land and untold riches, came across a mysterious and isolated island off the coast of Chile. As his ship neared the island, one of the crew members shouted down from the crow’s-nest. “There be giants on this island!”

Captain Roggeveen scoffed, but he reached for the tarnished brass spyglass that hung from his waist in a leather sheath. He held it up to his eye and adjusted the focus. What he saw made him jerk his head back. The crewman was correct. The island was inhabited by giants; stone giants.

All up and down the coast of this rocky island stood giant statues carved in the likeness of human heads and shoulders. Some of the stone figures appeared to be wearing great hats on their heads, and some of them even appeared to have gleaming eyes staring knowingly and ominously. The captain had sailed much of the world and seen many strange sights, but none were as strange as what he was looking

at through his spyglass right now on this Easter Sunday morning. These were the mysterious statues of Easter Island, the moai.

Captain Roggeveen called for a dingy to be lowered and appointed six men to accompany him to the shore. As they neared the island, Roggeveen realized that the strange guardian statues of the island were even larger than he had first thought. When the dingy hit the sand in the shallow, the crewmembers jumped out and dragged it up to the beach. Roggeveen jumped out and strode up the beach to take a look around. It was like no other tropical island he had visited. All the vegetation was gone. There was not one tree in sight. The only greenery was short stubby grass which covered the rolling hills like the unshaven stubble of a landlubber. At first, the island seemed completely uninhabited, but then one of the crewman shouted, “Cap’n, weez not alone!”

Roggeveen heard at least two of his crew’s pistols cock and looked towards the spot where the first crewman was pointing. On a rock, about a 100 yards down the beach, sat a figure. The figure was looking at them casually and seemed unalarmed by the new visitors on the shore of his island. Roggeveen noted that the figure appeared to be unarmed. He ordered the crewman, “Lower your weapons.” It was time to introduce himself to the inhabitants of this island.

As Roggeveen neared the figure he saw that it was in fact an old man. His skin was as dark as the sides of a ship and wrinkled and leathery like an old wineskin. He wore only a scrap of clothing covering his midsection and his hair was wispy grey and wiry. When the captain was close enough to see the man’s face he saw that his eyes were as white as his hair and completely covered in cataracts. He was blind. The man grinned a toothy grin as they approached him. Roggeveen wondered how the man knew they were approaching if he could not see them.

“Good day,” Roggeveen said in Polynesian.

“Mmm,” replied the man.

“What has happened here?” asked the captain. “Where is everyone?”

“I can tell you,” replied the man. “But if you ever want to sleep or smile again, you would be better to leave now and not hear my tale.”

Roggeveen had sailed his whole life and seen many sites himself that would make the most hardened man’s blood run cold. He was not about to let the ominous warning of an old man thwart him in his search for answers.

“Tell me, old man,” he demanded. “What has happened here?”

The old man grinned an almost evil grin and beckoned Roggeveen to sit. This is what he told him.

Student Response Stage:

At this point, students’ interests will have been sparked because of the story which has acted as a “hook” to spark their interest. It is now their chance to participate in the story telling element. The next step is to divide the students in groups of four. Their task is to come up with the tale that the old man told Roggeveen. Together they will need to develop a fantastic but believable story which explains the giant statues, the lack of vegetation and the disappearance of the inhabitants. This explanation will have to be presented to the class as a whole. It can be read as a reader’s theatre, enacted, or read as a story.

Results:

Most of the students were quite motivated to work at making their own responses to the story of Easter Island. The introductory story worked well as a hook. With the popularity of the “Pirates of the Caribbean” series, I think students were able to envision a setting that worked quite well with the Easter Island story. Johnny Depp has made the tropical island, sandy beach, and sailors almost become part of pop culture.

Group dynamics are always interesting. My class has about 30 kids, so that meant there were seven groups of about four or five working on their stories. There appeared to be three different types of groups. Groups that were somewhat stumped and had difficulty working together, groups that seemed to have fairly good chemistry and worked at getting the job done, and the groups that seem to go beyond your expectations.

Students planned their story out on paper. Some went into quite a bit of detail and wrote pretty much a word for word script for their presentation. Others concentrated on providing an outline of their story and took more time to practice the delivery. Of course there was the group that was not getting along with each other and one of the more motivated members grabbed the piece of paper and planned out the story on his own and basically presented it on his own as well. All in all, they were given about 20 to 25 minutes to do their planning.

In general, the presentations went as followed. One of the group members acted as the old man and sat on a stool while the other group members acted as or represented the sailors and Captain Roggeveen. The old man told his tale of terror which explained the reasons for the island’s desertion, the lack of

“The Mystery of the Moai”

By Nik Fast

SPARC LESSON PLAN

vegetation, and the fact that he was all alone. His explanation varied from group to group. This particular class had already some background knowledge presented to them about Easter Island, so all their stories included similar elements including tales of cannibalism. It would have probably been better to have presented this particular activity to them at the very beginning of the unit when prior knowledge of the subject would have been minimal.

The storytelling process made what could have been a rather dry presentation of notes on an overhead into an engaging activity. It allowed students to become involved in the story. One thing I did not do, but may do next time, is to play the part of the old man myself after all the groups had finished their presentations. I would then present the historical version of the story as colorfully as I could. I think that this lesson was quite successful and with some tweaks has the potential to be very effective.