

Who Is the Most Important Woman in History?

Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 6-8

Curriculum Focus: World History

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Student Objectives

- Discover why Cleopatra is considered one of the most notable women in world history.
- Use research and a ranking system to determine who they think is the most important woman in history

Materials

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Great Egyptians: The Real Cleopatra*
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- Caesar Comes to Egypt to Settle the Power Struggle Between Cleopatra and Her Brother
- Cleopatra Takes Caesar on a Tour of Egypt and the Roman Republic Dies
- Caesar is Murdered and Cleopatra Returns to Egypt
- Access to a photocopier
- Biographical reference materials in a class library, in a school library, or on a computer or the Internet

Procedures

1. Set the stage for a project that focuses on Cleopatra and other notable women. If necessary, explain that historically women have not had as much opportunity as men to lead society, but there were always exceptions, and the tide, of course, has been turning.
2. Stimulate a class discussion by asking: Is Cleopatra the most important woman of all time? Early in the discussion, establish definitions: What does *the most important* mean? Suggest that the class come up with the qualities that determine whom we identify as *important* – for example, fame, contribution to society, influence on other people, personal integrity, and so on.

3. Create a chart with at least five columns so that you can list the names of women and the qualities your class named to explain what *important* means. Put *Cleopatra* in the first column of the first row. Ask students to name other women to list in the rows under Cleopatra's name. Here are some suggestions of historical women your students may already have studied or at least heard about and can research: Sacagawea, Florence Nightingale, Madame Curie, Golda Meir, Susan B. Anthony, Harriet Tubman, Sandra Day O'Connor, Mother Teresa, etc. Some students may also suggest women who are entertainment or sports celebrities. Remember that the list must consist of women who can be easily researched.
4. Photocopy the partially filled-in chart. Keep the master of the chart for yourself, and hand out a copy to each student. Give students the following assignment:
 - On a separate piece of paper, for each woman, write at least one sentence explaining why she is important. If you can't write the sentence, you will have to do research to learn about the woman and then write the sentence.
 - On the chart, give each woman a score of 1 to 5 in all the columns except the last, with 1 being the lowest score and 5 the highest.
 - After you've written in the individual scores for all the women, add up the columns for each woman so that you get a total for her in the last column.
 - Circle the highest total score. If two or more women share the highest score, you can revise the numbers you originally wrote in each box. Or you can write a paragraph telling why you want to leave the scores tied.
5. Call on each student in the class to tell you who his or her highest-scoring woman is (or who tied for that student's top score) and what that number is. Keep a tally so that when you've polled the whole class, you will be able to tell students which woman came in first, which came in second, and so forth, as "the most important woman in history."
6. Ask students to comment on this activity. Ask what was easy about it and what was hard. Ask what the value is in going through such an exercise. (Some students may comment that it's ultimately not very important who is "the most important woman in history" – that they're all important. Other students may comment that ranking is a good exercise because it helps the ranker analyze his or her own values.)

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the traditional beliefs about Cleopatra focus on her beauty, rather than on her personality and intelligence? Discuss the problems a woman would have had in being a leader during Cleopatra's time. Debate whether or not those constraints have changed significantly today.

Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Student wrote a substantial sentence about each woman on the chart; completely followed instructions in the rest of the procedures.
- 2 points: Student wrote a sentence about each woman on the chart; mostly followed instructions in the rest of the procedures.
- 1 point: Student did not write a sentence about each woman on the chart; did not sufficiently follow instructions in the rest of the procedures.

Vocabulary

consort

Definition: The spouse/partner of a reigning king or queen.

Context: By the time Cleopatra was 23 she had gone even further than Alexander, making her entrance into Rome as queen of Egypt and consort of Julius Caesar, the most powerful man in the world.

femme fatale

Definition: A woman who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery.

Context: She's not wearing any jewelry, there are no earrings, no necklace; this is not the portrait of a *femme fatale*.

inflation

Definition: An increase in the volume of money and credit relative to available goods and services resulting in a continuing rise in the general price level.

Context: Government spending was out of control, inflation was rampant, and the administration of the country was in the hands of corrupt Greeks.

linguist

Definition: One who speaks several languages.

Context: The ancient sources tell us she was intelligent, witty, charming—a linguist.

prenuptial

Definition: Made or occurring before marriage.

Context: It was a prenuptial agreement that any Hollywood lawyer would have been proud of.

Academic Standards

Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History – Early Civilizations and the Rise of Pastoral Peoples: Understands the major characteristics of civilization and the development of civilizations in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and the Indus Valley.
- World History – Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires: Understands how Aegean civilizations emerged and how interrelations developed among peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean and Southwest Asia from 600 to 200 B.C.E.
- World History – Classical Traditions, Major Religions, and Giant Empires: Understands how major religious and large-scale empires arose in the Mediterranean basin, China, and India from 500 B.C.E. to 300 C.E.
- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the patterns and networks of economic interdependence on Earth's surface.
- Geography – Human Systems: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change

Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>