

American History

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Teacher's Guide

Grade Level: 9–12

Curriculum Focus: Civics

Lesson Duration: Two class periods

Program Description

American involvement in the war in Iraq has political roots in the events of 9/11. But how has the war affected the lives of everyday Americans? Follow the Arkansas National Guard on its treacherous road through Iraq.

Lesson Summary

Students discuss the term “public agenda” and then explore how the media help shape it by taking an inventory of local coverage of the war in Iraq. After reviewing newspapers, magazines, newscasts, and radio shows, students assess whether local coverage shows a balance between positive and negative stories and how they think the media shape public opinion. Students also view firsthand accounts and consider how they differ from those presented in the media.

Onscreen Questions

Part 1, “The Soldiers in Iraq” and “Making It Home”

- How can families of the soldiers show support?
- What can U.S. troops do to improve relations with Iraqis?

Part 2, “In the Thick” and “Home for Good”

- Why is diplomacy important in the world today?
- How does serving in a war affect a soldier’s return?

Lesson Plan

Student Objectives

- Explain what is meant by the term “public agenda.”
- Identify the characteristics and components of the media.

- Analyze how the media set public agendas and why.
- Explore the connections between the media and public opinion in terms of the war in Iraq.

Materials

- *Operation Iraqi Freedom* program
- Computer with Internet access
- Newsprint and markers

Procedures

1. Begin the lesson by asking students if they know what the term “public agenda” means. Develop a class definition and write it on a sheet of newsprint. A sample definition is “The issues and problems that government leaders and the public focus on.”
2. Discuss with students where the public agenda comes from. Help them understand that the media play a role in setting what issues the public focuses on and sometimes even how the public thinks about an issue. In this way, the media can also shape public opinion, the ideas and attitudes of people about a particular issue or event. Ask students how the media accomplish this. Their ideas should include the following:
 - By the stories the media choose to include in the newspaper, newscast, or radio show
 - By where stories are placed in the paper or on the show. For example, a front-page story will get more attention than one in the back of the paper, and a story at the beginning of the newscast will be viewed by more people than one toward the end.
 - By the mix of positive and negative stories. Check to see if there is an equal distribution of positive and negative stories. Sometimes more negative information than positive information is printed about an event. This sometimes happens because negative information tends to sell more papers or draw in larger audiences than positive information.
3. Next, ask students to apply what they have just gone over about the media, the public agenda, and public opinion to a particular event—the war in Iraq. Pose the following question: How do the media help shape public opinion about the war in Iraq in your community? To answer this question, tell students to review media coverage of Iraq. As a class, draw up a list of items they should look for and record them on a sheet of newsprint. Key items include the following:
 - The number of stories about Iraq in the local media
 - The placement of the stories
 - The emphasis of the stories. Are the stories mostly positive? Mostly negative? Is there a balance between positive and negative stories?

4. Have students select a partner to work with. If local newspapers are available at school, have students begin the assignment during class. Ask students to finish the assignment at home. Remind them to watch a newscast and listen to a radio show. Have students record the results of their reviews on a sheet of paper.
5. During the next class, discuss what students discovered about the local coverage of the war in Iraq. Was the coverage balanced, or was it skewed in one direction or another? How do the media help shape public opinion? Make sure that students can support their ideas with documentation from the media.
6. To show students one more way that information is conveyed, ask them to watch the program "Operation Iraqi Freedom." This show includes firsthand accounts of the experiences of soldiers in Iraq and their families at home. After viewing the program, ask students to think about the type of information being presented. Do these accounts differ from those found in the local media? If so, how?
7. Conclude the lesson by discussing how students can get a balanced view of a complex situation, such as the war in Iraq. Do they think that reading different newspapers and magazines, as well as watching a range of newscasts and talk shows, is helpful? How do firsthand accounts fit in? Help students conclude that the more points of view they hear about, the more information they have to consider, and the easier it may be to develop an informed, balanced opinion.

Assessment

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

- 3 points: Students clearly explained the relationship between the media and the public agenda; conducted a thorough review of the local media, including all the points requested; and offered at least two suggestions about how to arrive at an informed, balanced opinion about a complex situation.
- 2 points: Students explained the relationship between the media and the public agenda; conducted a satisfactory review of the local media, including most of the points requested; and offered at least one suggestion about how to arrive at an informed, balanced opinion about a complex situation.
- 1 point: Students partially or poorly explained the relationship between the media and the public agenda; did not complete the review of the local media and did not include most of the points requested; and offered no suggestions about how to arrive at an informed, balanced opinion about a complex situation.

Vocabulary

balanced coverage

Definition: A equal distribution of positive and negative news stories about a topic, especially one that appears in the news on a regular basis

Context: A soldier in the program *Operation Iraqi Freedom* claims that there is not balanced coverage of the war in Iraq; he says he thinks most of it is negative.

firsthand account

Definition: Reports about an event, such as the War in Iraq, given by people in the field, not by journalists covering the event for the media

Context: Firsthand accounts of the War in Iraq given by soldiers and their families are personal and based solely on their opinions and experiences.

media

Definition: Forms of communication that can reach large numbers of people; these include television, newspapers, radio, magazines, and online news reports

Context: The media's choice of stories and approach to the stories they choose have an impact on the public's perception of current events.

public agenda

Definition: The issues and problems that citizens and government leaders agree need to be focused on

Context: The media help shape the public agenda because they determine what issues people hear about and consequently what they think worthy of thought and discussion.

public opinion

Definition: The ideas and attitudes that a large number of people have about an issue, an event, or the workings of the government

Context: Public opinion is determined by many factors, including family values, education, and ideas expressed in the media.

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/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- Civics: Understands what is meant by "the public agenda," and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media
- Language Arts: Understands the characteristics and components of the media
- Language Arts – Viewing: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
 - Civic Ideals and Practices
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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>
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DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

How To Use the DVD

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

Play Video—This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

Video Index—Here the video is divided into sections indicated by video thumbnail icons; brief descriptions are noted for each one. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

Curriculum Units—These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

Standards Link—Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.



Teacher Resources – This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

Video Index

I. The Soldiers in Iraq

Follow a group of United States soldiers as they go about setting up camp in Iraq and participating in tasks associated with Operation Iraqi Freedom.

II. Making it Home

Every time U.S. soldiers leave their encampments, they run the risk of facing Iraqi insurgents. Watch soldiers as they attempt to do their jobs and make it home safely.

III. In the Thick

With the return of power to the Iraqi people came new issues for U.S. soldiers in the field.

IV. Home for Good

While an injured soldier goes home for evaluation, his company in Iraq is attempting to create peace and prosperity there.

Curriculum Units

1. Setting Up Camp in Iraq

Pre-viewing question

Q: What wars or conflicts has the United States been involved in during your lifetime?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you know anybody who has served with the military in Iraq?

A: Answers will vary.

2. Soldiers' Daily Duties

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you know about Operation Iraqi Freedom?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How do the daily tasks of soldiers in Iraq differ from what you had expected to see?

A: Answers will vary.

3. Showing Support for the Troops

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do you show support for something that you believe in?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: How have people or businesses in your community showed support for U.S. troops in Iraq?

A: Answers will vary.

4. Soldiers Visit a Medical Clinic

Pre-viewing question

Q: What does the idea of freedom mean to you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What problems did the soldiers see at the medical clinic?

A: The medical clinic has no operating room, blood bank, or anesthetics, and it is short on medicine.

5. Driving the Roads of Baghdad

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever experienced prejudice?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think that U.S. soldiers should be in Iraq?

A: Answers will vary.

6. A Day in the Field

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever visited a location very different from your home?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Why was it important for the soldiers to fortify the bridge?

A: The road over the bridge is the soldiers' only link to outside supplies. If insurgents were to destroy the bridge, the soldiers would be unable to get food and other items.

7. Preparing Iraq for Restoration

Pre-viewing question

Q: In your lifetime, what changes have taken place where?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think the restoration process in Iraq will be effective?

A: Answers will vary.

8. Transferring Power

Pre-viewing question

Q: How do laws and regulations set by the local and national government affect you?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What problems did the Iraqi National Guard experience?

A: According to the U.S. soldiers, the Iraqi National Guard was poorly equipped to take over national security in Iraq. The Iraqi soldiers did not have proper uniforms, they have only six outdated guns for an entire outfit, and their guard posts had no electricity or running water and could not provide adequate protection.

9. An Injured Soldier Comes Home

Pre-viewing question

Q: How would you define patriotism?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think going to Iraq for the first time would be more difficult for a soldier than returning there after a visit home?

A: Answers will vary.

10. An Iraqi City Council Meeting

Pre-viewing question

Q: How are rules made at your school or in your household?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think democracy is the best form of government for every country?

A: Answers will vary.

11. Working to Keep People Safe

Pre-viewing question

Q: What do you depend on your friends for?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: Do you think the U.S. soldiers should be allowed to patrol without the Iraqi National Guard soldiers?

A: Answers will vary.

12. Receiving Happy News

Pre-viewing question

Q: Have you ever been homesick?

A: Answers will vary.

Post-viewing question

Q: What attributes make a good soldier?

A: Answers will vary.