Lesson Extensions: A Walk Through Time

A New Seal for New York
Designed by English colonists in 1686, the seal of New York City captures a moment in history. On the seal, a sailor and a Lenape man hold a shield bearing a windmill, four flour barrels and two beaver pelts. In this activity, students decode the symbols on the seal, using what they know about the social and economic history of New York City. Then they design a new seal for New York, one that reflects the culture and achievements of the city today.

Objectives
• Interpret a primary source using prior content knowledge or secondary sources.
• Design a new seal for modern-day New York City.
• Write an informative paragraph supporting the new design, providing clearly stated reasons.

Materials
• Image of the seal of New York City
• Pencils
• Art supplies
• Copies of provided worksheet

Activity
• Show the image of New York City’s seal to the students. Explain that a seal is a stamp engraved with an official design, and that it is used to show that a document is authentic. An example of a seal can be found on printed paper currency.
• As a class, try to identify the elements within the seal. Explain any symbols that the students do not recognize.
• Have the class draw on their knowledge of New York City history to brainstorm why the colonists might have chosen each symbol.
• Use the discussion questions provided to reflect on what the choice of symbols reveals about the early colonists’ values.
• Hand out worksheets to the class and challenge each student to design a new seal that represents New York City today.

Optional:
◊ Research New York City history online or using the library.
◊ Before designing new seals, have students research the population, major industries and cultural achievements of the city to inform their design decisions.

Discussion Questions
• What is a symbol?
• Do the symbols on the shield have anything in common with each other?
• What do you think the symbols tell us about the way of life of early New Yorkers?
• City seals are symbols of civic pride. What do you think early New Yorkers were proud of?
• Does this seal reflect New York today? Why, and why not?
• Do you think this is an accurate representation of New York City’s history? Why?
Background
In 1686, the English governor of New York granted New York City the right to create its own seal. This was a significant privilege, marking New York City’s official incorporation as a chartered city with a recognized municipal government. While the figures on the seal have remained the same, the style of the design has changed over the years. The current seal was designed in 1977. The symbols on the seal are as follows:

- **Laurel Wreath**
  The seal is wrapped in a laurel wreath, a traditional symbol of victory.

- **Eagle**
  The American bald eagle was added in 1784, after the Revolutionary War. It replaced a crown representing the English monarchy.

- **Motto**
  Sigillum Civitatis Novi Eboraci is Latin for “The Seal of the City of New York.”

- **Sailor**
  The figure on the left is a sailor. He holds a plummet, a tool used to measure water depth. To his left and above the motto is a cross-staff, used to determine latitude. His presence speaks to New York’s history as a port city.

- **Native American**
  The figure on the right is a Lenape man, a member of the Algonquin tribe that originally inhabited Manhattan.

- **Beavers**
  There are two beavers on the shield. Beaver pelts were the leading commodity of the fur trade of the time. The large number of beavers on Manhattan Island brought Dutch settlers to the area.

- **Windmill**
  There is some debate about the windmill’s significance. The symbol of the windmill is on the arms of the Van Cortlandt family and may pay homage to New York’s Dutch heritage. Another possibility is that the windmill represented New York City’s successful grain industry.

- **Four Flour Barrels**
  In 1674, the Governor granted New York City the exclusive right to bolt grain, that is, separate it into bran and flour. Consequently, there was a tremendous boom in the flour and barrel-making industries. This, in turn, contributed to New York’s success as a center of trade.

Resources

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.1 and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.1
Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
Imagine that the mayor has asked you to design a new seal for New York City. The mayor would like the seal to include details that show why New York is a special place today. Think about people, places, and industries that are important to the city and then draw your seal in the space below.
Write a paragraph explaining why you chose this design. Be sure to include a topic sentence and specific details about why the symbols you chose are important to the city.
Living History

Overview
History isn’t just in books! Everyone carries a personal history with them, a history that has shaped who they are. At Wave Hill, students explore the history of the people who have lived, worked or traveled through the area. As an activity to prepare for the trip, students interview an adult friend or family member to discover how differently the recent past can be experienced by different people.

Objectives
• Conduct an interview with predetermined objectives.
• Write a well-structured, detailed narrative.
• Gain an appreciation for recent history and its effect on your own communities.

Materials
• Pencil and paper
• Computer access

Optional:
◊ Recording device

Activity
• Watch a Scholastic clip of Kid Reporter Abi Lista interviewing Ruby Bridges, the first African American student to attend William Franz elementary school in New Orleans: http://www.scholastic.com/teacher/videos/teacher-videos.htm#3194413933001/660604678001
• Ask students to identify the positive aspects of the Kid Reporter interview. Ask if there are ways that the interview could be improved.
• Have students choose an adult who they would like to interview and whose past they would like to learn more about. Explain the general concept of an interview, and identify as a class what would make a good interview.
• Split students into pairs or small groups and ask them to come up with at least five appropriate interview questions. Remind students to take notes during the interview and to bring these notes back to school.
• After they have conducted their interviews, have students write an article, short story or poem based on their interview. Encourage students to share their interviewee’s responses to the questions, and then their own written assignment. Post the written assignments around the classroom or bind them into a book.

Interview Tips
• Before the interview, establish a set of objectives or one overall objective. “I want to learn about his/her childhood,” for instance. Ask specific questions, but avoid asking yes or no questions, since they are less likely to get the interviewee talking.
• It’s okay to diverge from scripted questions, especially if an answer warrants a follow-up question or set of questions.
• Leave enough time for someone to answer your question—they might want a moment or two to think before responding.
• If you don’t fully understand an answer, ask for an explanation.
• Take notes!
• More detailed tips can be found in the Resources section.
Discussion Questions

- What answer to your interview question surprised you the most? Why?
- How was the life of the interviewee different from the life you live today?
- What can we learn from an interview that we couldn’t learn from a secondary source, like a textbook?
- What can we learn from an interview that we can’t learn from a written primary source, like a diary?

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.6.3
Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Resources

http://www.studygs.net/interview.htm
http://storycorps.org/record-your-story/question-generator
http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html#QUESTIONS
http://www.legacyproject.org/guides/lifeintttips.html