

Who Really Owns the Rosetta Stone?

A Problem-Based Learning Unit for grades 5-8

Designed and developed by
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The Problem

Soldiers of Napoleon's army discovered the Rosetta Stone in Egypt in 1799. As part of the spoils of war, the French army turned the stone over to the British forces. The Rosetta Stone eventually made its way to the British Museum, where it resides today. The central question is this: To whom does the Rosetta Stone rightfully belong?

Rationale for the Problem

Students are fascinated by the story of the Rosetta Stone. They are intrigued by the story of its discovery and how the stone made its way to the British Museum. Students are also fascinated by the separate story of how, after many failed attempts, a French scholar "broke the code", was able to translate the Egyptian hieroglyphs, the meanings of which were unknown to the modern world.

Student Roles

British Team Scholars from the Department of Egyptian Antiquities of the British Museum, London

Egyptian Team Scholars from the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

French Team Scholars from the Département antiquités égyptiennes Musée du Louvre, Paris

International Tribunal The group of international scholars and government officials who will decide the rightful ownership of the Rosetta Stone.

Learning Outcomes

From the State of Ohio *Sixth Grade Proficiency Test*

- Demonstrate knowledge of and ability to think about the relationship among events
- Examine instances of contact between people of different regions of the world and determine the reasons for these contacts
- Identify ways to resolve conflicts based on principles of fairness and justice
- Demonstrate an understanding of text and elements of nonfiction by responding to items in which they: analyze, summarize, interpret, and respond to the selection(s)
- Select information from a variety of resources to support ideas, concepts, and interpretations
- Critique and evaluate text (and arguments) for such elements as organizational structure and logical reasoning
- Utilize a variety of resources to consider information from different perspectives
- Focus on the topic with adequate supporting ideas or examples and communicate clarity of thought

How students will meet the problem

Students will be introduced to the Rosetta Stone by first trying to decypher a coded message provided by the teacher, which will replicate for students the difficulty the world had in translating Egyptian hieroglyphs. They will then read *The Riddle of the Rosetta Stone: Key to Ancient Egypt*, by James Cross Gibbons. This book is an excellent, short account of how the stone was discovered and deciphered. Following this introduction, students will be introduced to the central problem: To whom does the Rosetta Stone rightfully belong?

What students need to know

Following the introduction to the problem, in which students have read and discussed some basic information about the Rosetta Stone, they will be divided into the three national groups of scholars. Each group will be given assigned tasks to prepare for their presentations to the Tribunal. Each group will also be given Internet resources to help in this preparation. The groups will brainstorm the kinds of additional information they will need to compile and make plans for research.

Gather and share information

Research will be conducted by each group of "scholars." The members of each group will work individually and collaboratively. Resources will be provided for students online at the school web site. Research will be conducted at school during class time and outside of school on the students' own time. Internet research will be central to this PBL unit. Each group of scholars will also be expected to use technology in its presentation to the Tribunal, at the very least in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

Generate solutions

Each group of "scholars" will determine how they make their case to the Tribunal, but obviously each national group will present evidence and arguments to support that country's rightful ownership of the Rosetta Stone. The unit will culminate with presentations to the Tribunal. These presentations must include the use of technology in some way: PowerPoint, video, audio, etc.

Determine best fit of solutions

At the conclusion of the presentations the Tribunal will meet to discuss the issues presented. This discussion will be guided by another teacher. The Tribunal will be asked to consider which group made the best case for its ownership of the Rosetta Stone, perhaps using a rubric. The Tribunal, after consideration, will then vote and decide the fate of the stone.

Present the solution

The Tribunal will announce its decision to the three groups of national scholars.

Debrief the problem

The teacher will conduct a discussion on the information and issues presented by each group. Each group of "scholars" will have the opportunity to react to the process. Tribunal members will also have the opportunity to discuss the reasoning that went into their decision. Dissenting members will also be encouraged to contribute.

Duration of this PBL unit

Approximately 16 40-minute periods or equivalent