Investigating Cause for British Surrender following the Battle of Yorktown: A Circle of Knowledge Exercise with Historical Documents

1. Establish the topic and purpose of the discussion
   - The Battle of Yorktown and causes pertaining to British surrender negotiations, Treaty of Paris, 1783.

2. Develop a focus question
   - Which factors were most influential in the British decision to negotiate surrender following the Battle of Yorktown?

3. Develop a sparking question
   - Think about recent or historical moments of conflict in our Nation’s history, domestic or international. In those instances, what are/were the circumstances/factors that brought about an end to the conflict or to a resolution? (OR)
   - Think about an argument that you may have had with a friend, acquaintance or family member. In those instances, what are/were the circumstances/factors that brought about an end to the conflict or to a resolution?

4. Decide how students will acquire the information they need to participate in the discussion:
   - Students will view a short video on the Battle of Yorktown (and/or) take part in a short mini-lecture discussion.
   - Students will be divided into three groups:
     o **Group 1**: Economic Factors
     o **Group 2**: Social Factors
     o **Group 3**: Political/Intellectual Factors
   - Each group will read through key documents relevant to their assigned category. Each student in the group can read the same text or different texts.
   - **NOTE**: While there are three categories used to frame the discussion, teachers may choose to have multiple sets of each category depending on class size, learning needs, etc.
5. Develop a kindling activity.
   a. Part 1: Have students answer their questions individually
   b. Part 2: Have students answer their questions in a small group.
   c. Part 3: Have students discuss as a large group. Keep track of answers.

   • Part I: After reading their assigned documents individually, each group member will
discuss why they think their category/factor (e.g., social, political, economic) was the
most the significant leading to negotiated surrender. Have students write their
group’s comments on the handout provided.

   • Part II: Break students into groups of 3 (one for each original group; or adapt as
needed while ensuring category representation). Have students discuss their
respective category/factor and why they believe that each was most significant.

   • Part III: Bring class back as a whole group. Have them discuss the original prompt
together as a class:

   PROMPT: Which of these elements, social, political/intellectual, or economic, had
the greatest impact on the British decision to negotiate surrender following the Battle
of Yorktown in 1781?

4. Create a synthesis activity for the discussion
   a. A written summary of all the opinions
   b. A defense of one’s own opinion against the others
   c. A group project
   d. A visual organizer

   Option B: What mattered most!?Given what students have learned in their small
groups and during the whole-class discussion, have them write a short essay
answering the activity prompt for themselves. In the essays, ensure that there is a
commitment to evidence-based reasoning. Teachers may wish to require that
students incorporate at least 2-3 documentary sources to support their claims.
Also, depending on time constraints and grade-level, this assignment may be most
appropriate as a homework/extension of the lesson activity.

Selecting the right research-based strategy for every lesson. Alexandria, VA: Association for
Supervision and Curriculum Development.