Perspectives on Malaga Island: From Scorn to Shame to Sympathy

Darcie Drew
University of Southern Maine

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Perspectives on Malaga Island: From Scorn to Shame to Sympathy

By: Darcie Drew     Mentor: Adam Schmitt Ph.D.

Abstract
Local and national perspectives of Malaga Island have changed substantially from the time of settlement to today. I researched these perspectives in order to create a week-long unit for a 7th grade Social Studies class here in Portland.

Background
Malaga Island off the Maine coast was a home to a small interracial fishing community from 1860 to 1912, at which point the State of Maine evicted the residents. Several islanders were subsequently institutionalized at Pineland School for the Feebleminded; the rest were left to rebuild their lives elsewhere. Governor LePage apologized for the actions of state officials 100 years later, in 2012.

Primary Sources
My investigation included various primary sources: photographs of the original settlement, newspaper articles from around the country about the community and its dissolution (1900s and today), documentary video and audio, non-fiction texts about Malaga and Pineland, contemporary art and song on the subject, archeological objects from Malaga, and fictional texts about the story of the island. Most resources were compiled for students to then access, some were for my edification so that I could answer student questions.

Lesson Series
I then built workshop style lesson plans, so students would have a chance to interact directly with the primary sources and their differing viewpoints.

- Day 1: Life in the 1900s & The Eugenics Movement
- Day 2: The Story of Malaga
- Day 3: Yellow Journalism
- Day 4: Historic Perspectives
- Day 5: Modern Perceptions
- Days 6-10: Project Workshop

Memorial Project
The unit culminated in an authentic project wherein students created their own memorials to the people of Malaga Island. These memorials were shared with school visitors in December.

- In groups of their own choosing, students created a visual memorial and a plaque for said visual.
- Independently, students wrote a justification for why their memorial is the way that Maine should remember the people of Malaga Island.
- Students were required to submit evidence of drafting for both their visual and their writing along with their final products.
- Students were assessed on their written communication, visual communication, and knowledge of history.

Conclusions
The unit served a multitude of educational purposes. Students learned about their local history, how to analyze primary sources, how important it is to consider multiple perspectives before forming an opinion, and how to contribute to a community conversation about history.

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References