Instructional Activities for the Second Millennium

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As we begin the third millennium, the second one becomes part of world history and a new way to categorize, teach, and learn about the past one thousand years. For teachers and students, the use of trade books in the classroom offers some creative ways to learn about and appreciate the historical milestones of the second millennium.

In Fall 1997, “The Millennium: 100 Events that Changed the World,” was published in a special issue of Life. The article featured descriptions and photographs of one hundred of the most important events and people of the past one thousand years. In 1998, the book The Life Millennium (ISBN 0-821-22557-X) was published. An expansion of the article, the book is a treasury of ideas and events of the past millennium and an excellent impetus for an instructional unit in world history.

Nancy Livingston, a children’s literature lover and frequent speaker at workshops for teachers, was inspired to create a list of children’s books that align with the top ten events cited in the article and book. The list lead to instructional activities which include the use of trade books in a world history curriculum.

First is Livingston’s list of book for young people which corresponds to the ten most important events of the second millennium as identified in The Life Millennium. After the list are suggested activities for world history instruction.

Livingston’s Reading List of the Second Millennium Most Important Events

Event Number 1: Gutenberg Prints the Bible in 1455

The books that describe the event:

Gutenberg’s Gift: A Book Lover’s Pop-Up Book
Written by Nancy Willard
Illustrated by Brian Leister
Published in 1995 by Harcourt Brace

Breaking Into Print
Written by Stephen Krensky
Illustrated by Bonnie Christensen
Published in 1996 by Little, Brown
ISBN 0-316-50376-2, $16.95

Event Number 2: A Global Civilization: Columbus’s Voyage, 1492

One book that describes this event:

Westward With Columbus
Written by John Dyson
Photos by Peter Christopher
Published in 1990 by Scholastic
ISBN 0-590-43846-8, $15.95

Event Number 3: Luther Knocks Down the Door: The Protestant Reformation, 1517

A book that describes this event:

Thunderstorm in Church
Written by Louise Vernon
Published in 1993 by Greenleaf Press
ISBN 1-882-51408-4, $7.95

Event Number 4: The Machine Age Gears Up, 1769

A book that describes this event:
Instructional Activities

Find a copy of the article “The Millennium: 100 Events that Changed the World” or the book The Life Millennium. After reviewing the materials, decide which of the following activities would most benefit students, or adapt these suggestions as needed.

Activity One: As an introductory activity in a world history class, ask students to individually identify what they consider to be the ten most important events, people, and discoveries of the last millennium. Discuss the events in class. Introduce the article or book and check the publication to see if the events chosen by the young people made the Life list. Use information from the article or book and from classroom discussion to generate a new list of the 100 most important events of the second millennium. Such a list could be published in the school newspaper or placed on the school’s web site. At the end of the course, a revised list could be compiled and published.

Activity Two: Have students read all or part of the article or book. Both are designed so that they be read/viewed in segments. Discuss the importance of the events, why they merit inclusion, and what impact they have had on society and on each individual in the class. Challenge students to develop their own lists of most important events of the second millennium,
to justify their choices, and to locate books dealing with the events. In lieu of books reports, ask the class to construct a time line on craft paper around the perimeter of the classroom using facts and events gathered from their readings.

Activity Three: Compile a reading list similar to the one above using sources such the school’s library catalog, *World History for Children and Young Adults: An Annotated Bibliographic Index* by Vandelia Van Meter, *Literature Connections to World History* by Linda G. Adamson, and *Children’s Books in Print*. Include both information books and historical fiction. Ask each student to select and read a different book. In lieu of book reports, ask the students to construct jackdaws relating to the book. Although some people know a jackdaw as a bird that mimics the human voice and gathers brightly-colored object to build a nest, in the educational context, a jackdaw is a collection of artifacts based on a historical event or period. According to Dodd, “jackdaws may include such items as maps, a time line, diary entries, recipes, biographical sketches, newspaper clippings, music, clothing, artwork, letters, or advertisements.”¹ Jackdaws make great individual, team, or class projects and enhance both learning and retention.

With the use of trade books and creative instructional activities, both teachers and students will gain new insights and a greater appreciation of the past. Have an exciting time visiting the second millennium in your classroom.

¹ Elizabeth L. Dodd, “Echoes of the Past,” *Childhood Education* 75, no. 3 (Spring 1999), 136.