

The Interrogation Room

Questioning the Acts of Individuals during the War of 1812

History is peppered with heroes and villains, and what makes one fall on one side over the other is often a matter of opinion. In desperate circumstances, like those faced in times of war, people are forced to make choices, to take decisive action. For some, history will look back and reveal that the right choice was made, others will be forever remembered for a bad choice, inaction, and even cowardice.

Learning outcomes: This activity will provide students with the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills by questioning the actions, choices, impact and significance of key individuals during the War of 1812.

Activity: Working in flexible groupings or as a class, students will role-play an interrogation, where other group members or classmates put key historical figures from the war on the “hot seat” by questioning their choices and subsequent actions. This can also be done in a trial-like setting where the rest of the class will serve as a jury and debate the innocence or trustworthiness of the individual in question.

Suggestions:

Before the interrogation:

1. Have students conduct research on the following individuals who were involved in the various battles of the war (See the attached planning sheet to assist in this research):

- [General William Hull](#)
- [Joseph Willcocks \(and the Canadian Volunteers\)](#)
- [Captain Robert Runchey](#)
- [James Madison](#)
- [Andrew Jackson](#)

2. Once students have completed their research, have them in their groups decide which individual(s) they would like to role-play for the interrogation room, as well as who will perform the questioning. For example, a group of six can have three students role-playing and three students interrogating. Every group member can contribute towards developing the questions and answers.

3. In their respective groups, students can decide on the types of questions that will be asked in the interrogation. Use the planning sheet to help create these questions. For example, the interrogator can question General William Hull on what ultimately brought about his decision to surrender Fort Detroit. A series of 5 – 10 questions should be generated for the interrogation.

During the interrogation:

4. Groups will take turns presenting their interrogation to the class. The classroom can be set up to look like a traditional court room, or, you can simply have the character sitting on a chair facing the rest of the class, as the interrogator walks about asking questions.

5. Consider having the character in question dress in period costuming, while having the interrogator dress in appropriate attire (professional wear such as a suit jacket, collared shirt and lengthy skirt or pants).

After the interrogation:

6. When the interrogation is done, consider having the rest of the students in the class vote on the innocence or trustworthiness of the character in question. Discuss why you believe this character's actions were legitimate to his/her cause or what kind of punishment this character should serve for his/her actions.

7. Have students select one of the characters questioned in the interrogation room. Have them write a letter as their chosen figure to their families or to their superiors explaining why they were being interrogated and how it made them feel.

Name: _____

Date: _____

War of 1812: Interrogation Planning Sheet

Name of historical figure: _____

Actions (*specific role in the War of 1812*):

Significance (*impact he/she had on the war*):

Questions:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

