

Lesson Plan 3: CABEZA DE VACA'S DILEMMA

Grade Level: 4-10

Overview:

In this lesson the students will use decision trees to look at the decision point in Cabeza de Vaca's life, when he had to decide whether to stay with the native peoples or return to the Spanish. They will conclude by deciding how they think Cabeza de Vaca should have decided and why.

Objectives:

The students will:

- Make decision trees to organize their thinking about the choices Cabeza de Vaca and his men faced when they had to decide whether to return to civilization after eight years with the native peoples.

Related National Standards:

History:

- Understands cultural and ecological interactions among previously unconnected people resulting from early European exploration and colonization.
- Understands aspects of the Spanish exploration, conquest, and immigration to the Americas in the centuries following Columbus.

Thinking and Reasoning:

- Applies decision-making techniques.
- Analyzes decisions that were major turning points in history and describes how things would have been different if other alternatives had been selected.

Materials:

Procedure:

1) Draw a blank decision tree on the chalkboard. This resembles a main "tree-trunk" with the question written on it, with "Y" or "W" forks extending upward from it, depending on how many possible alternatives there are in the decision to be made. Use a contemporary decision to model how the decision tree works. For example: label the tree-trunk with the question "What shall I do after school?" Ask students to suggest what alternatives they have to answer this question. List these on each of the forks. (For example, do homework, eat a healthy snack, eat junk food, play sports, etc.) Then ask students what the good and bad consequences of each of these alternatives are and list them along that fork... and

then list the consequences of each of these consequences... etc. Ask the students to answer the question on the tree-trunk and make a decision using the information from their decision tree and explain why they decided the way they did.

2) Explain to students that they will be making a decision tree for Cabeza de Vaca. The question they must answer is: What should Cabeza de Vaca do— stay with the native people or return to the Spanish?

3) Ask each of the students to fill in his or her decision tree with the question, possible alternatives for Cabeza de Vaca, and then the good and bad consequences of each of the alternatives as completely as possible.

4) Then they must evaluate how important each of the consequences might have been and decide what they think Cabeza de Vaca should have done when he was faced with this dilemma.

5) Ask students to write a paragraph explaining the decision they made and the reasons why they selected it. Share these paragraphs and discuss.

6) Review what happened to Cabeza de Vaca after he returned to the Spanish and after he was forced to return from Paraguay. How might Cabeza de Vaca's later life have been different if he had made a different choice?

Assessment Recommendations:

Assess the students' decision-trees and concluding paragraphs to see how well the students develop their main ideas and use strong support and rich details.

Extension and/or Adaptation Ideas:

Adapt the use of a decision-tree with a current school or community problem or issue.

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