A Marine's Marine:
Remembering Sergeant Michael Strank



Subject: American History (Unit on WW2), Local History

Grade: 8th

Allotted Time: Three Classes, 40 Minutes Each

Additional time will be required for the Thank You Sergeant Strank – Tribute Project

Learning Objectives

- Students will be able to identify and describe the series of events that led to the photograph being taken of the flag raising on Iwo Jima.
- Students will be able to analyze the importance of the *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* photograph as well as describe the overarching effects of that famous image.
- Students will be able to identify Sergeant Michael Strank's exploits on Iwo Jima as well as assess the overall the overall impact he had both locally and across the United States.
- Using his past feats and accomplishments for inspiration - Students will devise, design, and create a tribute to Sergeant Michael Strank.

Pennsylvania Academic Standards

CC.8.5: Reading Informational Text: Students read, understand, and respond to informational text – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

CC.8.5.6-8.A

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CC.8.5.6-8.B

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CC.8.6: Writing: Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

CC.8.6.6-8.C

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CC.8.6.6-8.G

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, using search terms effectively; assess the credibility and accuracy of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CC.8.6.6-8.H

Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis reflection, and research.

8.1: Historical Analysis and Skills Development

8.1.8.A

Compare and contrast events over time and how continuity and change over time influenced those events.

8.2: Pennsylvania History

8.2.8.A

Compare and contrast the social, political, cultural, and economic contributions of specific individuals and groups from Pennsylvania.

8.2.8.D

Compare and contrast examples of how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations impacted the history and development of Pennsylvania.

- Ethnicity and race
- Immigration
- Military conflict

8.3: United States History

8.3.8.A

Examine the role groups and individuals played in the social, political, cultural, and economic development of the United States.

8.3.8.B

Evaluate the importance of historical documents, artifacts and places critical to United States history.

8.3.8.C

Summarize how continuity and change have impacted U.S. history.

- Technology

8.3.8.D

Examine how conflict and cooperation among groups and organizations have impacted the growth and development of the U.S.

- Military conflict
- Economic stability

Materials and Resources

- **Computer**
- **Projector**

Day 1

- ***Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* Photograph**
- **National Archive Photo Analysis Worksheet**
- **P.O.S.E.R.S. Primary Source Graphic Organizer**
- **Raising The Flag At Iwo Jima: Story Behind The Photo | Flashback | NBC News**
- **Smithsonian Connection – Mighty Seventh War Loan Drive – PDF**
- **The Uncommon Valor of Michael Strank – PDF**
- **The Next Page: Victory at Iwo Jima**
- **Sgt. Michael Strank Gravesite**

Day 2

- ***Our Flag Still Waves* Documentary – Found on strank.org**
- **Video response Sheet Graphic Organizer**
- **WSQ (Watch-Summarize-Question) Method**

Day 3

- Sgt. Michael Strank's 100th Birthday Celebration
- Slovakia Honors Michael Strank with Stamp Series
- Marine Raised Flag at Iwo Jima And Profile of Immigrants' Service

Or

Iwo Jima Flag Raiser Gets Citizenship Papers

- Marine Corps War Memorial
- *Our Flag Still Waves* Documentary
- *The Oath Slovakian Documentary* ***and*** *The Oath* Slovakian Documentary 2
- *Flags of our Fathers*

Teacher Rationale

Real, true heroes don't come around that often. Men and women of high integrity and incredible honor, whose actions are as awe-inspiring as they are virtuous, seem to be more fable than fact. So when you encounter a person in history, a person who was clearly put on this earth to do good, you have no option but to dig deeper. Michael Strank is that person, that hero, and as a beloved son of Cambria County, his story **MUST** be told for generations to come.

It just so happens that Strank's story places him right in the middle of one of the most reproduced images of all time: *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima*. When AP Photographer Joe Rosenthal pressed the shutter of his camera on Mount Suribachi, the image of Sgt. Michael Strank and five of his brothers-in-arms swept the nation as a symbol of dedication and perseverance. The photograph was in every newspaper in America, and served as the spark that ignited a renewed sense of patriotism that lasted until the end of the war. *Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima* was the centerpiece of the Seventh War Loan Drive that raised $26 billion in just six weeks. Michael Strank would have been treated like American royalty had he ever gotten off of Iwo Jima, but that was not to be. Less than two weeks later, Sgt. Strank was killed by artillery fire, dying before ever knowing the powerful effect he had on millions of Americans; including those in his hometown of Franklin Borough and Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

With all that being said, the goal of this lesson plan is to finish the story of Michael Strank. Demonstrate that he was more than just 1/6th of a photograph, more than just a hand steadying a flag pole. He was a devoted son, a caring brother, an inspiring friend, and a Marine's Marine.

Student Background

Ideally, you would be utilizing this lesson plan during the heart of your unit on the Pacific Theatre during World War II. This three day lesson would serve as a nice featurette on the story of the flag raising and the local hero behind it. If this was the case, your students would be well educated on the events leading up to the Battle of Iwo Jima and be well aware of the motivating factors that drove both sides to the island. They will understand the situation back in the states, including the general weariness of war and diminishing returns from the war bond drives. This lesson should connect seamlessly to their knowledge base as the lesson looks at the heroics of Sgt. Strank and his fellow Marines as well as the impact the photograph had on all Americans.

Realistically, I understand that many teachers reading this lesson plan are not in the above situation. Most of us will treat this as a mini-lesson that can be taught during the lead up to events such as Michael Strank's birthday, Veterans Day, or the anniversary of the flag raising on Iwo Jima. If this is the case, it is very difficult

to assess exactly what knowledge base your students are coming in with. I would suggest surveying your classes, or starting a KWL chart, in order to formulate some understanding of their familiarity with the Battle of Iwo Jima and Sgt. Strank. Using the data, build an introductory lesson or even a quick anticipatory set that can be used to get your students caught up to speed. Obviously this doesn't have to be flashy or even rigorous, but it should be effective enough to cover the following points:

- What was World War II and why were Japan and the United States involved?
- What led these two countries to Iwo Jima? Why was the island a key strategic location? What was at stake for both sides? What was the fighting like between the two countries before Iwo Jima?
- How did people in the United States view the war at this time? What was the war effort like before Iwo Jima?

Procedures

Day 1

- Start class with an easy-to-setup anticipatory set. On your whiteboard, project an image of Joe Rosenthal's ***Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima***. Provide no additional information and ask your students to analyze the primary source. You can have them analyze the image using a number of methods:
    - **Photo Analysis Worksheet from the National Archives**
    - **P.O.S.E.R.S. - Primary Source Graphic Organizer**
    - Class specific primary source analysis method
    - Analysis through leading questions and class discussion
- Depending on the level of knowledge your students possess, tell the abbreviated story of the Battle of Iwo Jima and the moment that Rosenthal's photograph was taken. Watch the following NBC News video that looks at Rosenthal's personal narrative from that day.
    - **Raising The Flag At Iwo Jima: Story Behind The Photo | Flashback | NBC News**
- Though this is a Michael Strank centric lesson plan, it is crucial to understand just how important Rosenthal's photograph was to the American public. It reinvigorated our country's patriotic spirit, brought attention to the seventh war loan drive, and became a symbol of American determination and perseverance. The 1st page of the following Smithsonian Connection article has more information on the Mighty Seventh war loan drive in Pittsburgh. If needed, use this information to bulk up your discussion or even read it in class.
    - **Smithsonian Connection – Mighty Seventh War Loan Drive (1st Page)**
- Time to transition from the photograph to the man - Sergeant Michael Strank. Depending on your students and school location, Michael Strank may be a household name or it could be the first time they are hearing his name. To start, you can quickly mention Strank's role in the flag raising and point out where he is located in the photograph. To get a solid understanding of Strank (before you watch *Our Flag Still Waves* tomorrow); choose to read one of the following three articles. You can use whatever reading strategy works best for your class.
    - **Smithsonian Connection – Mighty Seventh War Loan Drive (2nd Page)**
        - Nice and simple three paragraph biography, somewhat continues the war loan drive discussion.
    - **The Uncommon Valor of Michael Strank Biography**
        - Very detailed when compared to the first option. More appropriate for high school students based on length and language choices.
    - **The Next Page: Victory at Iwo Jima – Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**
        - A relatively detailed article as well. When compared to the first two options, this article features more quotes from family members and fellow Marines.

Also references some of the memorial projects used to honor Michael Strank, which we will look at in more detail on Day 3.

- To finish up Day 1, you can show an image of **Sgt. Michael Strank's tombstone** at Arlington National Cemetery. This should help to drive home Strank's story and the finality of his tragic death.
- If you so desire, you can pass out an exit slip with a few engaging questions in order to check for understanding.

Day 2

- Based on data from the exit slip (if you used one), quickly recap the key points or problem areas from yesterday's lesson.
- Now that we are at the apex of the lesson plan, you will show the documentary on Sgt. Michael Strank entitled ***Our Flag Still Waves*.** Your students should have no problem following along, as they now have a nice base of knowledge thanks to yesterday's lesson. Luckily, there is plenty of new information that will be covered during the 37 minute runtime.
    - This is an incredible documentary that should keep the attention of your students from start to finish. However, it would be relatively simple to create an activity that will hold students accountable and keep them on task.
        - Post an essential question or two on your board to direct learning
        - Use a **Video response Sheet Graphic Organizer**
        - Try the **WSQ (Watch-Summarize-Question) Method**

Day 3

- If you utilized an activity during yesterday's documentary, you can start class by reviewing the answers that your students came up with. If not, it shouldn't be difficult to lead a general recap of the video's major points through leading questions and class discussion.
- Our last look at Michael Strank will be focused on how he has been remembered (locally, nationally, and internationally) since his heroic actions on Iwo Jima in 1945. Advise your students to pay close attention here, as they will be asked to create a tribute of their own to wrap up this lesson. Divide your students into even groups and give each group a news article that looks at a unique way in which Sgt. Strank has been honored since WW2 came to a close.
    - **News articles on Michael Strank** can be found under Materials & Resources Section on Day 3.
- Have your students read the article as a group and then summarize the major points from the article in paragraph form. The articles are relatively short, so after everyone is finished, the goal will be to share their findings with the class. The method in which you do this is up to you. A few possible strategies include:
    - Have a representative from each group read their summary to the class, fielding and answering questions when needed.
    - Use a version of the jigsaw strategy and have a member from each group come together and share their summaries.
- When they are finished, use the rest of class time to introduce the Thank You Sergeant Strank - Tribute Project

Evaluation

- While you could easily quiz your students as a way to evaluate what they have learned, that method of assessment does not seem to quite fit with Sgt. Strank and this lesson plan.
- For the last three days, your students have gotten to know and appreciate Sgt. Strank as not only a Marine's Marine, but as a hometown hero and a truly honorable man. Though his life and legacy have clearly been celebrated and appreciated by many (as evident by Day 3's lesson), I believe there is always room for additional acts of commemoration.
- The goal of the Thank You Sergeant Strank - Tribute Project is for students to use their newly acquired knowledge to devise, design, and create a tribute to Sergeant Michael Strank. The project itself is really only limited by student imagination, but as the teacher, you can set guidelines and create rubrics as needed.
- Student tribute projects can include, but are NOT limited to:
    - Thank You Letters
    - Poems
    - Posters
    - Drawings, Sketches, Paintings, and other Artwork
    - Physical Memorials
    - Exhibits in a Classroom or a School Display Cases
- Ideally, this project will allow student creativity to flow and stimulate the minds of Cambria County's youth as they find new ways to honor such an important figure in our nation's history.