



Historical Crime lesson

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STANDARDS:

Historical Thinking Standards:

- Standard 2: Historical Comprehension
- Standard 3: Historical Analysis and Interpretation
- Standard 4: Historical Research Capabilities

LESSON:

Select a historical crime from local or national events. Examples of crimes to research include murders, kidnappings, bank robberies, or train wrecks.

Read about the crime in current history books or local histories. Identify the crime's participants, date and location.

Study the crime and participants from original sources.

▪ **Sources for the crime:**

- Historical newspapers: Search historical newspapers at the time of the crime through any trial coverage. What was the newspapers coverage of the crime at the time? Did it make regional and national newspapers as well? What clues do the papers hold about the events that led to the crime?
- Historical Maps: Locate maps from the time of the crime. Analyze the neighborhood around the crime to see if it had an effect on the crime. City directories would also aid this analysis.
- Court Records: Study court documents created for the trial. Contact local libraries, historical libraries or court houses to locate the records.

▪ **Sources for the participants:** Locate records for the participants from before and after the crime.

- Vital Records: Were the participants married before or after the crime? How old were they when they died? If a murder occurred, check for the cause of death on a death certificate.
- Census Records: Find information on their occupations, income, neighborhoods and family. How did these facts influence their lives and the crime?
- Cemetery Records: Locate where they are buried and try to get a photo of their grave markers. How are they remembered today?
- City Directories: Who were they living with at the time of the crime? What was their occupation?

Create a new written history based on the original documents.

- What was the crime?
- Who were the participants? What type of people were they?
- What were the possible causes of the crime? What previous events led to the crime?
- What was the aftermath? What was the community's reaction? How did the police handle the case? What happened to each of the participants after the crime?

As a class, discuss how the history written about historical crimes can be different from the original records.

Discussion questions include:

- Does history today tell the whole story of historical crimes? What is missing?
- What do we know now that the media didn't know at the time? How did that affect the story being told?
- Why is it important to check sources from the time instead of relying on printed histories to get the full picture of an event?