



Satellites, Weather and Climate
Lesson plan: Vermont's Flood of 1927
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Grade Level: 9-10

Social Studies Curriculum Topic Standards: H&SS: 10 (9-12), 11 (9-12), 15 (9-12)

Subject Keywords: floods, Vermont, government, policy

INTRODUCTION

The "Flood of 1927" was, for Vermont, a natural disaster that had significant effects on the terrain, physical infrastructure and government policy of the state. Presented in an American History class, this three-day lesson shows students the weather and historic events that occurred during the flood using photos, maps and eyewitness accounts. It also serves as a case study of the emergency response to the floods in their aftermath, as well as the more long-term policy changes that happened later on. And it looks at how disasters like this one may lead to changes in attitude toward government, and in how communities see themselves.

Objectives:

1. Students interpret geography and solve geographic problems by analyzing how technological and environmental changes impact settlement patterns over time.
2. Students show understanding of various forms of government by describing how government decisions impact citizens locally, nationally and internationally
3. Students show understanding of past, present and future time by taking a public stand on a defensible position based on an understanding of the past and present.

MATERIALS

Much of this material can be found online through a simple search of "Vermont Flood of 1927". The rest is archival and is available in publications or through the Vermont Historical Society and the University of Vermont photo archives.

Article: "A Hard Rain's Gonna Fall: The Lasting Legacy of Vermont's Greatest Natural Disaster", Sally Pollack, Burlington Free Press, November 3, 2002

Photographs: The 1927 Flood in Vermont and New England, November 3-7, 1927: An Historical and Pictorial Summary, WE. Minisinger, MD, President of the Blue Hill Meteorological Observatory, 2002

"Then and Now" Aerial Photographs by Federal agencies and University of Vermont, documenting changes in Vermont landscape affected by flooding

Eyewitness Reports from: "The Troubled Roar of the Waters", Vermont in Flood and Recovery, 1927-1931, Deborah Pickman Clifford and Nicholas R. Clifford, University of New Hampshire Press

Film/Video: Vermont Public Television Program, Flood of 1927 (21 minutes) with extra shots available at the Vermont Historical Society Museum, Montpelier, Vermont. Much of this video and local photographs available on line.

LESSON FORMAT

This lesson is divided into three 90 minute block presentations, each with a different focus on the flood of 1927.

Day 1: The Perfect Storm leads to the Great Flood

Discussion starts with recent flooding that may have occurred around the time the lesson begins, using news footage currently available on the web (at the time of the original lesson, severe flooding was happening in North Dakota). Students discuss how flooding might impact their area, and how Vermont's unique geography, especially its mountains and rivers, might impact flooding today.

Students then view NOAA weather maps, and read short articles about the Flood of 1927 as overviews documenting the emergence of the storm (the collision of two tropical weather systems over the Northeastern United States). They complete a Webquest using sources listed above to research the actual events of the November 3-7 Flood. Finally students complete a short exit card answering the question: During a natural disaster emergency in a particular state, what are the pros and cons of accepting and receiving government help or funding?

Day 2: Picking Up the Pieces

Class begins with a journal question: Describe a "typical" Vermonter (or New Englander): plain-spoken, self-sufficient, distrustful of powerful government, belief in the idea of people "pulling together" in a crisis, etc. How would you have reacted in the wake of the storm? What are some of the things you hope would have happened first as a response?

Students are then divided into small discussion groups to watch and discuss specific pictures and eyewitness accounts of the flood damage and policy aftermath: aerial views of changed landscape, accounts of towns "washed away", railroad system destroyed, areas completely cut off from the "outside world", limited response by Vermont officials, and their refusal at first to "take government help".

Groups complete a "talk chalk" on big paper, as they show what they learned about the flood

aftermath.

Finally students are presented with a group project task to act as emergency response planners for a different natural disaster. Roles may be assigned to students responsible for different viewpoints: taxpayer, governor, federal official, local Farm agency, State/Federal emergency agency, Chamber of Commerce, constituents. Students are asked to write a short statement presenting their viewpoint as to how best to respond to this emergency and whether (or how much) to accept help from federal authorities. For homework, students must complete the statement to be used in a "mock hearing" the next day.

Day Three: Into the Future...

On the last day of this process, students again begin with a journal question: What might be the one point you can make (as one of the assigned participants) to support your position on government help?

Students then hold a mock hearing. The moderator (the teacher) presents the outlines of the emergency and the question before the group meeting, "Should the state accept government help, and at what cost, during this emergency?" Various representatives read their statements, and answer questions from other reps and constituents. Final statements are made.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT:

As homework, students prepare for an essay assessment to be held the next day, reframing the questions as they relate to lesson objectives and these three questions: How did the Flood of 1927 change Vermont forever in terms of its topography, its infrastructure, its self-image and its attitude toward government help? How might Vermont's unique geography influence its government's response in the event of an emergency? How might the state's attitude be different toward federal aid during the Great Depression (CCC, WPA) five years later? How would you respond in your community in the event of an emergency, now that you know what happened to Vermont in 1927?



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