

What if Abraham Lincoln Had a Facebook Page?

What if Alexander the Great had a Facebook profile and updated his friends about his conquest while hundreds of miles away from Macedonia? And imagine if Alexander Hamilton and Aaron Burr had a Facebook duel.

Assign a biography report to your students and watch them slide into an educational coma, but talk about Facebook and see them come to life. You can pique your students' interest in history by supplementing the traditional biography with an assignment to create a Facebook page for a historical figure that they can present to the class.

Would You Friend Lincoln?

If a student had to do a biography on Abraham Lincoln, she could create a Facebook page that would list all his basic info, such as birthdate, hometown, current city of residence, schools attended, past and current work experience, relationship status, religious and political affiliation, and contact information. She could post pictures of important events in his life and use information from her report to write captions under each photo.

She could post a status update that says something like, "Abraham Lincoln is at Joe's Tea Shoppe preparing for a debate with Stephen Douglas." She could post some video clips of modern actors portraying Lincoln giving a speech and comment about the highlights.

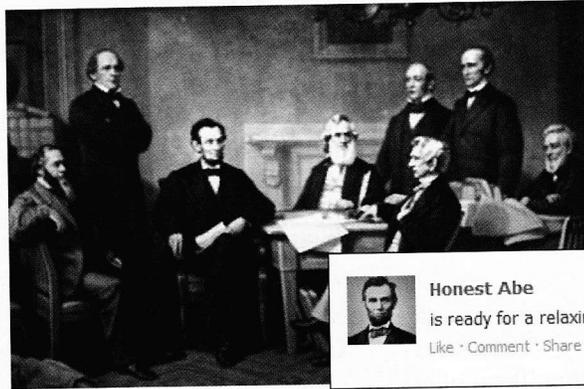
She could "like" pages that conform to Lincoln's preferences and hobbies or names of people he respected and admired. She could write a "note" about how Lincoln is dealing with the harsh reality of losing a child to illness.

Facebook has a feature that allows users to create a poll, so she could have Lincoln poll citizens about how



Honest Abe

Signing of the Emancipation Proclamation...Please comment, share and like!!!



Honest Abe

is ready for a relaxing night at Ford's Theater.

Like · Comment · Share · 32 minutes ago

he should respond to the attack on Fort Sumter. She could post photos of his political adversaries and comment on how they are an impediment to his agenda. She could post a link on the wall of a song that the Union Army would sing and explain its significance. She could create an event for the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Finally, she can do a status update that states, "Abraham Lincoln is getting ready to enjoy a night at Ford's Theater."

Students would have to put their own timestamp with a month, day, and year to the posts on their walls to reflect the proper timeline of events.

Facebook and Human Conflict

Facebook documents the evolution of a relationship, like a real-life form of digital storytelling. If you've been on Facebook for awhile, you've probably seen Facebook friends develop new love interests. And you've probably also seen some of those relationships go bad. In history class, your students can use Facebook to document historical conflicts in much the same way.

One way to make this happen is to assign each student to create a page for a person or country involved in a particular conflict.

For example, students could document the evolving relationship between the United States, the Soviet Union, and Cuba during the Cold War. Students could start by filling in the About Me sections to illustrate the differences in geography, history, religion, economic theory, and government philosophy. Facebook "likes" can highlight cultural differences, such as the Soviet Union liking Karl Marx, communism, and hockey, whereas the United States would like Adam Smith, capitalism, and football.

Using status updates and comments, students could show how the Soviet Union and the United States worked together to defeat Germany during World War II, but after the war, they became "frenemies" as the Cold War began. The Soviet Union and the United States may "poke" or send friend requests to other countries, enticing them to join their side during the Cold War. The Soviet Union could post an event for invited guests to join

By Brant Glover

History

them for the Warsaw Pact convention. The United States could create a Facebook poll to ask friends to weigh in on who will win the space race.

Students could document the rise in nuclear proliferation by posting duck-and-cover classroom clips. The rise of Fidel Castro could lead the Soviet Union and United States to send “secret messages” to Cuba’s inbox persuading Cuba to side with their country during the Cuban Revolution. With dictator Fugencio Bastiata out of the picture, Cuba would accept the friend request from the Soviet Union and not the United States. This would inevitably lead to a virtual exchange during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Status updates could reassure the public that each country is prepared for any potential nuclear missile conflict. Cuba would then post a

note telling all American businesses to leave Cuba.

The United States would elicit patriotic pride by posting YouTube clips of Rocky Balboa boxing the Soviets’ Ivan Drago with the song “Burning Hearts” playing in the background. Students can explain the domino theory in a note. The Soviets can promote their propaganda by posting a video of their Afghanistan invasion. The United States can post a miniclip of Reagan giving his famous “Tear Down This Wall” speech and comment on its significance. The Soviet Union profile will eventually cease to exist and have to be “deactivated.” Economic hardship can hit Cuba’s wall through reports, graphs, and charts as their main consumer, the Soviet Union, is no longer around to support their economy.

Give Technology a Chance

Many educators need to change their negative views of technology if they are to take full advantage of powerful digital storytelling tools. Students are already on Facebook and understand how it works. Why not integrate this social tool into your classroom assignments, especially biographies and reports on historical conflicts or events.

School leadership must foster an environment that allows technology to spark learning. Most important, educational leaders need to create a supportive learning environment for these newly converted technology enthusiasts coming into the digital age.

—Brant Glover has been a social studies teacher at Gainesville Middle School in Georgia, USA, for seven years. He has a master’s degree from Brenau University in Gainesville and an educational administration degree from the University of Georgia.

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