

# **TEACHING STUDENTS BY USING PITTSBURGH SPORTS**

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What do we think about when we think of Pittsburgh? Do we visualize the three rivers or the many bridges that span across them? Do we think of down town and the tall skyscrapers where many people work and shop? Maybe you think of the Buhl Science Center or Heinz Hall and the many historic places in the city? Well I immediately think of sports and the championship teams of the Pirates, Steelers and Penguins.

## **Childhood Memories**

Some of the fondest memories I have of my childhood center around the Pirates, Steelers and later the Penguins. I can remember as a little boy sitting in front of the television as the snow covered the ground on a winter afternoon watching the Steelers play football. My uncles would come over and together with my father we would focus intensely as the Steelers of the 1970's would make their annual strive to win the Super Bowl. We would agonize over every missed opportunity for the Steelers to score a touch down or when the opposing team did. We would cheer at the great game saving plays that the talented athletes on the Pittsburgh team would make just when you thought the other team as going to win. Players like Terry Bradshaw, Franco Harris, Lynn Swan, "Mean" Joe Green and Jack Lambert were larger than life on those Sunday afternoons.

The Pirates of the 70's also hold fond memories for me. I remember going to Three Rivers Stadium on a warm summer day and watching the Pirates play baseball. I wished I could be just like them turning double plays and hitting home runs. When my friend and I would play in the park I always pretended I was Phil Garner. He was the second basemen for the Pirates and that's the same position I played for my little league team. The Pirates too, were very successful in the 70's. They won several World Series Championships and their success also made the players Pittsburgh heroes. Players like Roberto Clemente, Bill Mazeroski, Willie Stargel and Phil Garner gained the respect and admiration of the city.

Lastly, the Penguins followed in the footsteps of the Pirates and Steelers and in back to back seasons 1990 and 1991 brought the Stanley Cup to Pittsburgh. Even though in 1990 I was not an impressionable young boy, I watched the Pens with amazement as great hockey stars like Mario Lemieux, Jaromir Jagr, Ron Francis and Kevin Stephens skated their way to the pinnacle of their sport. The energy, precision and strength exhibited by those players were a thing to watch. The city embraced the Penguins as they joined the Steelers and the Pirates as true champions of Pittsburgh. As Mario Lemieux raised Lord Stanley's Cup over his head, people immediately developed a rebirth of their sense of pride in Pittsburgh.

## **Pittsburgh, The Quintessential Sports Town**

Pittsburgh has developed over the years into a sports town, loyal but also highly critical of the Steelers. In the beginning of the 20th century the children of European immigrants have developed a strong love / hate relationship with the Steelers. These children grew up with football and used it to release some of the pressure of working in the steel mills. They showed up by the thousands to cheer with all their hearts as a real life Horatio Alger story unfolded before them.

The second and third generation steel workers easily identified with the Steelers. The type of the work that they did makes this connection natural. Steel workers were forced to work long hours where they often performed manual labor like shoveling coke in foundries with temperatures often reaching 100 degrees or more. In order to survive, these mill workers had to be hard and tough. They developed a persevering attitude and had to be determined and physically fit so that they could complete the tasks required of them. Because of the nature of their jobs, Pittsburgh steel workers immediately connected with the Steelers. Football too, can be considered blue collar. The style of play, that the Steelers of the 1970's exhibited, hard hitting and aggressive with a never quit desire to win immediately enamored Pittsburgh with them.

Steel workers in Pittsburgh also identify with the concept of teamwork that exists in professional sports . To win a championship it requires every member of the team to make a contribution to reach the final goal. Everyone on the team must play a role whether it is as a star or a minor player. If they do not perform to the expectations of the coach then the team suffers. They must all work together for the sake of the team's goal of winning and put individual goals and individual recognition aside. Members of a successful team suppress this personal desire to contribute to the much larger concept of winning a championship.

This concept of teamwork was also present in the Pittsburgh steel mills. Often times workers in mills were organized into crews to complete tasks. They too, like athletes had to work together to complete the daily assigned work. If one worker was lazy or refused to do his/her job the other crewmembers were forced to pick up the slack. If the jobs were not completed on time the workers also faced the possibility of being fired. This idea of teamwork being important in both sports and in the mill also serves to strengthen the identity between Pittsburghers and their professional sports teams.

This strong connection that the people of Pittsburgh have with the Steelers also causes them to be highly critical. To some degree, we were spoiled by their past achievements, successes and Super Bowl championships. Since the Steelers brought the city to the highest level of accomplishments by winning four super bowls, people have a difficult time adjusting to anything less. We don't know what it is like to suffer winless seasons, where the Steelers perform poorly and failed to reach the high expectations set each year. Recently the people of Pittsburgh had to take a pill they found very bitter and hard to swallow.

My father taught me so many important things when we watched those games together. He would point out the qualities that professional athletes possess and he would speak about how much work and practice it takes to even make it to the pros. He would tell me after the Steelers or Pirates lost that success takes time and that if you try hard enough, don't give up and be patient that good things will happen. He also used those games to teach me to play fair, respect other people and be a gracious winner or loser. I have developed a sense of pride about where I live and a large part of that is due to watching the Pirates, Steelers and Penguins and learning from them. Those men became my heroes and I wanted to be just like them, strong, fast, powerful and dedicated. They were role models for me and many other young boys and girls growing up in Pittsburgh.

### **The History Of Pittsburgh Sports**

In my opinion it is professional sports that have supported and developed the Pittsburgher's sense of pride. Today the city is building two new stadiums for both the Steelers and Pirates. Hopefully, with the new construction will come a rebirth of sports in Pittsburgh. This new growth will also hopefully bring people back to the city. In addition these new stadiums will keep the teams in Pittsburgh so that we will not have to worry about losing the identity that was created over the last century.

There are also economic benefits to keeping professional sports in the city. Hundreds of jobs are associated with the games that are played. Each team employs many people who walk the sidelines and work in the front offices. Secondly, the new stadiums will bring much needed revenue. People work in the stadiums selling and taking tickets and making the hotdogs that have a special taste when eaten at the ballpark.

When I found out that next year the scope and sequence of U.S. History was going to change I was very confused and initially unwilling to change the way I taught the class. I had several questions that made me feel uneasy about this change as well as the possible answers to those questions. I could not believe that I would not spend one whole semester on early American History. The idea of focusing primarily on the 20th century quite frankly upset me. I have a lot of worthwhile activities that I have used several times in the past with a certain level of success. Questions like what will I use in their place or what will I leave out were ones that I would have to think about.

I calmed down after a while and when I really started to think, I got over the fear and thought that maybe this is actually a good thing in disguise. Instead of rushing through the events and concepts of American History because there were so many to teach, I could limit these topics and actually have my students explore what really happened from several perspectives instead of just scratching the surface like the years before. I was starting to become more comfortable with the idea. I thought that this would be the perfect opportunity to teach a unit on Pittsburgh History. In the past the opportunity to do this was literally impossible. We had to cover all topics of U.S. History from the Incas, Mayas and Aztecs on to Colonial America, the American Revolution and the Civil War in the first semester. This very rigorous course of study allowed little, if any deviation from the progression of American History. There could be no time for additional topics of interest no matter how exciting or beneficial to the students. It is the new scope and sequence that when implemented next year will allow for some diversity.

My U.S. History classes and I will discover how the events of the late 19th and 20th century have effected the people of Pittsburgh and how the city has evolved from a blue-collar mill town into a center for art, sports and technology. The evolution of Pittsburgh labor unions will be the starting point of this examination. We will discuss the lasting implications of the Rail Road strike in 1877 to the Homestead strike in 1892. We will discover the bravery and courage possessed by those workers determined to win the right to earn a wage that they could live on.

This unit will also include looking at down town to see how the city has changed from a dirty, smokey and ugly place to one that has become a center of culture and art. Places like Heinz Hall where professional theatre companies perform the most acclaimed shows to the Carnegie Science Center where people can learn about the world and universe around them, will be on the list to topics to investigate.

We will spend a significant amount of time tracing this evolution to ultimately create an understanding of what it is to be a "Pittsburgher". Throughout the 20th century the people of Pittsburgh have identified with blue-collar morality, like pride, hard work and dedication. It is my theory that these beliefs have allowed people to also identify so strongly with their professional sports teams. Everywhere you go in the city are signs of this connection between people and the Pens, the Pirates and especially the Steelers. Since the glory days of the 70's the spirit of Pittsburgh lives and dies with sports. This spirit has lived on even though the mills and the blue-collar workers of the past have not.

Attending the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute has helped me develop my perspective about Pittsburgh, which is present in this narrative. In class we have examined the development of Pittsburgh and the roles that the city has played in several larger movements and events. We have pin pointed several time periods to study so that we may discover what it was like to live in Pittsburgh at that time and experience what it was like to go through a particular event.

I learned about the Native Americans living in and around Pittsburgh during the French and Indian War. We discussed the many tribes and their contributions to the time period. We watched a video -- The Battle of Bushy Run that occurred just outside of Pittsburgh. We heard fascinating commentary from Dr. Charles McColleston from IUP who showed us slides of paintings that depicted the customs and styles of these Native Americans. Lastly we read The American Indian As Hunter, which also discussed the customs of these Pennsylvania Indians.

We then learned about the contribution that Pittsburgh has made to the abolitionist movement and the city's stops along the Underground Railroad. John Burt regaled us with incredible stories of a barber's shop on 5th avenue that was a stop in the Underground Railroad. We also read two excerpts on the subject. The first was Underground Railroad: Official National Parks Handbook and the second was about Jane Grey Swisshelm.

The next area we discussed was the labor movement. We specifically examined the Railroad Strike of 1877 and the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892. We watched the video titled The River Ran Red created by Steffi Domike our seminar leader and Nicole Fauteux. After watching the video we discussed the events with Steffi to gain a better understanding of the courage and bravery that the Homestead workers exhibited. The video made me realize how fortunate I am to not have to risk my life to earn a competitive wage.

Lastly, we looked at the steel mills and the impact that their closing has had on Pittsburgh. We examined the racism that existed and the conditions that modern day steel workers experienced until the mills closed. The idea that minorities were only good for manual labor and not management positions were presented in the video Struggles in Steel: a Story of African-American Steelworkers by Tony Buba and Raymond Henderson. We also had Raymond Henderson himself as a guest speaker to help us gain an understanding of the difficult conditions for minorities in the steel mills.

Together, the books, articles, videos and guest speakers, helped me and the members of the class develop a sense of where Pittsburgh came from and ultimately where Pittsburgh is going. The city is rich in history and experience, some good and some not so good. The idea though, is that collectively this history and experience has shaped the city in which we live in. We must as "Pittsburghers" embrace this common identity that we all share so the positive aspects of Pittsburgh can be perpetuated and negative ones can be eliminated.

I believe that there is a great benefit in teaching and learning about concepts such as these. Giving students a sense of pride about where they live and ultimately about themselves is very beneficial. By studying Pittsburgh and its sports teams we can attain some of the abstract goals that are often difficult to achieve. I teach a Public Service/Leadership class and I can see a tremendous benefit in examining sports and the qualities that athletes have developed. Most sports require teamwork and it is when we truly work together that great things can be accomplished. We can learn what characteristics are required to become a productive member of the team. Sacrifices of individual goals and rewards must be made for the team to succeed and not just one player. The old and often overused saying "there is no I in team" still remains relevant.

Our communities today are starving for people to become involved and who are willing to examine the problems that we are having. As teachers we need to help our students develop a sense of pride and dedication to their community. We have to help our students understand that they have a responsibility as members of their community no matter where, to try and make it a better place to live. They must develop this sense of civic duty so they can become active members who work together to solve whatever problems exist today and will arise tomorrow. Issues like racial tensions and inequalities, safe neighborhoods and streets and even community education can all be addressed if we show our students the benefits of getting involved and working together. An examination of Pittsburgh and the successes of their professional sports teams would help our students develop this sense of pride and civic duty and in the end benefit all people who live in Pittsburgh.

In addition we can use sports to help students learn some of life's important lessons. Just as my father did, we can show students the positive qualities that it takes to become successful and productive members of their community. I will require my students to identify their favorite professional athlete and list the reasons why they chose him or her. Students can then begin to determine the qualities that their athlete possesses in order to understand what it takes to become a successful. They can then begin to list the characteristics that carry over into real life situations to see with their own eyes the right and wrong things to do.

We can also use sports to assist other subject areas in reaching their specific goals in education. The Board of Education of Pittsburgh has identified 62 specific standards that a student who graduates must achieve. The areas of: Citizenship, Science and Technology, Environment and Ecology, Career Education and Work, Family and Consumer Science, Mathematics, Arts and Humanities, Wellness and Fitness and lastly Foreign Language have all been addressed by these standards. As teachers we must assist the other disciplines to achieve their set of standards whenever possible. We must teach students in general and share the responsibility whenever possible. By expanding the focus of what we teach just a little bit and by using our creativity, we can teach across the disciplines instead of just one subject. This concept can fit in to this unit of Pittsburgh Sports very easily

Sports rely heavily on Math and Physics. Keeping complex statistics that help the team and coach adjust their strategy when they are less than successful requires basic computational skills. Students too can use math to explore sports. They can calculate a player's batting average, slugging percentage or on base percentage. They can examine the Physics of wind resistance and spin rate to see how to throw a curve is able to break down and away from hitters.

Students can practice and develop their literacy skills by reading and writing compositions about then moral issues behind sports. Students can answer complex questions like "Did free agency ruin the home town team"? Or they can write a speech and practice communication skills by having a debate over controversial issues such as " Should Governor Ridge have spent State tax dollars to keep the Pirates in Pittsburgh.

Health and Wellness issues can be addressed by studying the typical diets of professional athletes. Students can research to discover what types of foods make the human body perform at the highest level. They can use injury statistics to find out what sports are the most dangerous or what parts of the body are most vulnerable to injury.

Pittsburgh sports are arguably at a high point with the construction of PNC Park for the Pirates and later a new football stadium for the Steelers as well. By using Economics my classes will determine how important sports is to Pittsburgh fanatically in addition to spiritually. Students will discover how much money the Steelers, Pirates and Penguins bring to the city. Areas such as taxable income, tourist revenue, marketing of memorabilia and ticket and vending sales are all economic aspects that can be discovered and explored. Students can also practice communication skills by having a debate whether or not the mayor should have used city tax money to support all three teams. They can practice and use research skills in addition to a literacy component to develop a persuasive speech on the subject.

I hope that by teaching this unit my students will be able to learn about many things. Students will gain a better understanding of Pittsburgh as a city and about the blue-collar traditions and attitudes that have developed here. I hope they learn about moral issues like dedication, perseverance and hard work. In addition I hope to use Pittsburgh Sports to teach lessons that expand across the disciplines to include Math, English, Health, Science, and Citizenship. Lastly I hope that I have convinced you that Pittsburgh Sports is a topic that is worth teaching in your classroom.

### **Teaching Objectives**

This unit is designed to take approximately 3 to 4 weeks to complete. As the Pittsburgh School District requires, the proposed activities and lesson plans will attempt to help the students achieve proficiency in several areas designated by the list of 62 standards. The District requires proof that each student reaches this proficient level to graduate; so incorporating them in this unit is imperative. For a list of these standards see appendix 1.

In addition to the 62 standards, this year 1999-2000 our school district has initiated a literacy policy and strongly suggests that reading, writing and critical thinking skills be promoted across the disciplines and not

just in English classes. This unit then must also include and to some degree focus on implementing these literacy skills as well as any applicable standards and goals of the district.

Personally I believe that as a social studies teacher it is my responsibility to incorporate these literacy skills in my weekly lesson plans when ever possible. In today's service based economy the students we send out into the work force must possess these skills to survive. The closing of the steel mills in Pittsburgh has also closed a chapter in its history. We must provide our students with the abilities to open a new one that is based not on physical ability but the ability to communicate with each other and work together. Keeping this in mind, the following lessons are centered on this literacy focus.

### **Teaching Strategies**

Although this year I taught three very different subjects: Civics, United States History and Public Service/ Leadership, I wanted to develop this unit so that there were elements that I could use in each class. There are elements that if properly developed, could be utilized by all three of these classes. One example of this is requiring each student to choose a Pittsburgh athlete that they admire most. In Civics class the students could examine the role that person plays in the community. In United States History the class could study the career of that person to discover their position in Pittsburgh History. Lastly, Public Service/ Leadership students would research the athlete of their choice to see how athletes can give back to the community that supports their career and sport.

### **Lesson 1- HERO PROJECT**

**Standards-** In addition to the Communication and Social Studies standards in appendix 1, students will learn and develop their literacy skills. They will practice research skills and reading comprehension. Students will also learn organization and task completion skills.

**Objectives-** Students will be able to compose a report about a professional athlete that they admire most. They will be able to apply the information that they acquire to answer a specific set of questions in that report.

#### **Materials-**

- 1) Paper, pencil pen or computer
- 2) Access to a library with various research materials

#### **Procedure-**

- 1) Have Students choose a professional athlete that they admire most.
- 2) Have students write a 2 to 3 paragraph essay in which they discuss the characteristics of the person they picked.
- 3) Take students to the library for 2 class periods where they can research their athlete.
- 4) The research that students complete should help them find out the following information:

- a) Information about the career of that person ( ex: years played, points scored, teams played for and championships won )
  - b) Information about the personal life of the athlete that they chose. ( ex: where they live, how many children they have and what charities they are involved in )
- 5) The students should then compose a research paper about the athlete they chose.

It should be 10 to 12 paragraphs in length and include the following information:

- 1) Introduction about why you chose this particular athlete
- 2) A synopsis of the career of the athlete
- 3) Discussion of the qualities and strengths of the athlete
- 4) What contributions has this person made to the community in which they play
- 5) Conclusion about what they could apply to their own life.

### **Rubric ( Evaluation )**

Highest Proficiency- a student has performed at the highest level of proficiency if :

The paper is 10 to 12 paragraphs in length  
The paper is well written with no grammar or spelling mistakes  
The paper includes all 5 areas of information  
The paper is turned in on the specified date

High Proficiency- a student has performed at a high level of proficiency if :

The paper is 7 to 9 paragraphs in length  
The paper is well written with minimal grammar and spelling mistakes  
The paper includes 4 of the areas of information  
The paper is less than 2 days late

Average Proficiency- a student has performed at an average level of proficiency if :

The paper is 6 to 7 paragraphs in length  
The paper has several grammar and spelling errors  
The paper includes 3 of the areas of information  
The paper is 3 to 5 days late

Below Average Proficiency - a student has performed at a below average level of of proficiency if :

The paper is less than 6 paragraphs in length  
The paper has many grammar and spelling errors  
The paper includes less than 3 of the areas of information The paper is more than 5 days late.

## **Lesson 2 - PITTSBURGH SURVEY**

**Standards-** In addition to literacy skills, students will practice and develop communication, citizenship and cooperation skills

**Objectives-** Students will compose a survey consisting of at least five questions that they will ask at least five people. after completing the survey the students will get a better understanding of what Pittsburgh is all about.

### **Materials**

- 1) paper and a pencil
- 2) five people to take the survey

### **Procedure**

Class 1

1) First discuss with your class what topic you want to develop a survey about. ( for this unit it will be about sports in Pittsburgh)

2) Develop a questionnaire with your class that contains 7 to 10 questions that you would like people to answer. Here is a sample of some of the questions that you can ask:

- 1) Are you a sports fan?
- 2) If yes what is your favorite Pittsburgh professional sports team? If no start answering from #9
- 3) Who is your favorite player?
- 4) How many games did you attend last year?
- 5) What was the average amount of money you spent at each game including the ticket price?
- 6) Did you attend any other sporting events? If yes, what were they and how many games did you attend?
- 7) How many games did you watch on television?
- 8) On a scale of 1 to 10 ( 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest) how much would you miss your favorite team if it left Pittsburgh?
- 9) Since you are not a sports fan, what do you find entertaining? ( ex: concerts, movies, plays, opera.....)

10) Do you go out to enjoy this?

11) If yes, how much do you spend in one year ?

3) Have your students take copies of their questionnaire home to give to people to answer.

Make sure to give students several extra because everyone may not return them.

4) Compile on the chalkboard, the results of the surveys. Chart how many people answered yes to #1 and so on

5) After the data is collected have the students write 2 to 3 paragraphs about what the survey means.

6) Have a discussion about their writing and what the surveys really meant?

### **Evaluation-**

1) Were the survey questions developed in a coherent manner?

2) Did the questions all focus on the same topic?

3) Did the student care to have different groups of people complete the questionnaire to get a broad basis for the survey?

4) Were the students able to compile the data collected in a way that was useful ?

5) Were the students able to analyze the data in a critical manner to come to a general conclusion?

### **Lesson 3 - COMPARING GOVERNMENT AND SPORTS**

**STANDARDS-** The students will identify the roles that Government plays and the various powers and responsibilities that they have. In addition students will practice organization and communication skills.

**Objectives-** Students will analyze the roles and duties that the individual members of our government have. Secondly, they will apply what they have learned by comparing these roles to that of professional sports. They will compare the organization and structure of baseball, football hockey. . . etc., to that of government.

### **Procedure-**

1) Have a discussion about the various roles and duties of the government. Be sure to include all levels local, state and federal.

2) Ask students to compare the U.S. Government to that of professional sports. discuss these questions to help students develop ideas:

a) What particular sport is organized most like our government?

- b) Who in that sport acts most like the President?
  - c) Who would be the Vice President?
  - d) Who would act like Congress?
  - e) Who would act like the State Governments?
- 3) The students then should write an outline or an essay, 3-4 paragraphs where they make this comparison.
  - 4) Allow students individual library time if they are unfamiliar with the organization of the different professional sports leagues.
  - 5) After the students have completed the comparison (2-3 class periods) have a discussion about what they did.

### **Evaluation-**

- 1) Did the student incorporate all offices and levels of government in their comparison?
- 2) Did the student discuss why they chose the sport they did?
- 3) Did the student demonstrate some knowledge of the roles and duties that our government has?
- 4) Did the student include all three levels of governments?
- 5) Were the comparisons between the offices of government and that of a sports league accurate?

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